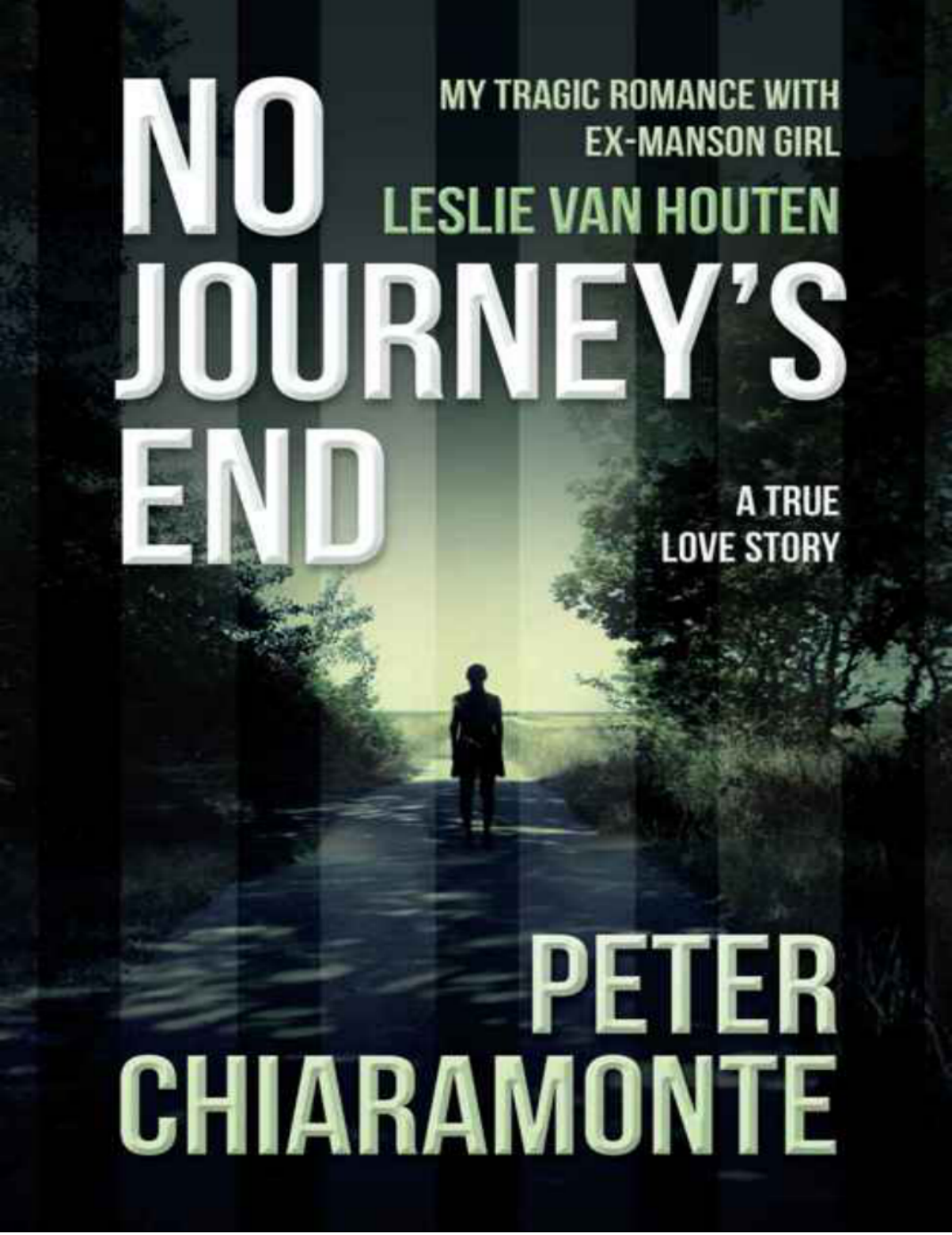
MY TRAGIC ROMANCE WITH
EX-MANSON GIRL
LESLIE VAN HOUTEN
NO JOURNEY'S END
A TRUE
LOVE STORY
PETER
CHIARAMONTE

This is a true story based on actual persons and real events. The names of some secondary characters have been changed, several of whom are, in fact, composites.

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than my own records. I have relayed these events to the best of my knowledge.

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PROLOGUE

Monrovia, California, Independence Day, 1978. We had been celebrating a revolutionary declaration of freedom and other noble causes. Complete with a modest, but earnest, fireworks display put on by friends and neighbors of her brother David Van Houten. Les and I spent all day and half the night at a family picnic. We had a busy week planned, so we didn't stay late. And since Leslie's mother Jane was staying overnight at a neighbor's, we had her place in Monterey Park to ourselves for the evening.

In front of 429 Sefton Avenue, Leslie got out of our old MGB and asked me, "Will we have time to stop by Judy's and pick up more of my things tomorrow?"

"We can get some of that on the way back from Glendale," I said. "Or we can grab it on Sunday. You and David can take Milo's van, and I'll break in the bike on my own."

"So you've made up your mind?"

"That's what we're doing first thing tomorrow. You keep the car, and I buy the motorcycle—unless you and one of your beaus have made other plans for what to do with the money?"

"Don't be smart," Leslie said. "Just as long as it's something we *need*, not just something you want to play with. We have to be prudent, mister."

Placing a gentle kiss over her heart, I said, "How prudent is that?"

* * *

The sun was already up when I opened my eyes. The air was warm and dry and the skies were clear and unclouded, except for the smog and the smudge. Morning birds were making a racket. I could hear

shower taps running, and Leslie was humming some old R&B song. I thought, what were the odds she might consent to another shakedown in the shower if I hurried to put my request in? It only seemed right to take chances.

After we climbed out from the tub and dried off, Leslie put on a bright summer print dress. I put on jeans and a sweatshirt. I laced up my old leather Pumas, no socks, and said, "If we do bring a bike home today honey, you'll have to change into something rougher and tougher. Leather and spurs ought to do it."

"Most of my things are still at Judy's or in suitcases I left at Linda's…What spurs?"

"We'll gather the rest of your gear on the way up to Isla Vista. We can stop by Judy's later today on the way back from Glendale."

I zipped up the back of her dress, wrapped both arms around her, sieged the nape of her neck and shoulders with kisses, and instructed, "This is how I want you to hold on to me when you're on the back of the bike, okay?"

"Whatever you say, fella. I'll make tea while you shave. Just *look* how chafed my chin is, you monster." She covered her face with her hands, made a face and asked no one in particular, "Where does my mom keep the cold cream?"

When I was done washing up, I came outside to the patio where Leslie was reading about herself in an old *Los Angeles Times* and casually smoking a cigarette. I rolled a joint and smoked it alone while she tidied the kitchen. I could tell she had other things on her mind besides café racers. I knew it was selfish of me to impose reckless habits on her.

"Time to get this show on the road," I said, once again hungry for substance.

Leslie locked up the house, and we drove straight through the heart of LA to Glendale. It took us nearly an hour in freeway traffic. Once we arrived at the motorcycle shop, Leslie put her hand on my forearm and tried one last time to appeal to my conscience.

"We don't need a lot of things Peter, you know that."

"Bikes are much cheaper to run," I said, sensing my bluff might be working.

Then, pointing over her shoulder at two rows of Italian motorcycles lined up in the showroom, I pleaded, "Come on, darlin', let's straddle that awful beast and go for a skate on the highway."

"Not in this dress, I'm not!" Leslie said.

At least now she was smiling.

They had one Ducati 900 Super Sport on the floor—but it was way

out of our price range. There were, however, four or five new and used Benellis and Moto Guzzis all spiffed up and polished. Two or three were brand-spanking new Le Mans I thought we might afford with a loan. One was fire engine red and had custom gold trim on the fuel tank and fairing.

Leslie asked the salesman if she could use the telephone. She needed to check in every few hours during the jury's deliberations. Meanwhile, I climbed on the Moto Guzzi 850 V2. It wasn't like any bike I was used to. I couldn't wait to turn her on and twist open the throttle. I was anxious to hear how she sounded and feel how she handled.

"Get off the phone Leslie, will ya?" I said, showing off. "I want you to see this."

She was still out of reach, checking in on the phone with Dante, her bondsman.

The salesman kept smiling. He could see I was a serious buyer. He was eager to help push the bike out to the curb for a test ride. I was just about to switch on the engine when—looking ashen and pale—Leslie swiftly came walking towards us.

"We gotta go," was all she needed to say.

The verdict was finally decided.

1

A CERTAIN WORLD

The day things began, I woke up guilty and sore. No doubt from the residual effects of some far-reaching intemperance gone wrong the night before. The human body has no reason to lie to itself. So whatever flesh of the devils I'd taken, it only seemed just that I suffer. Whether through the looking glass or straight down the rabbit hole—call it the price of tuition. Some drugs I took to escape, others I took to explore.

Winter was just getting started, and I was also slightly depressed by the cold weather and so few hours of daylight. It was Christmas break 1976 at the University of Toronto where I worked while still going to school. I'd already graduated from St. Michael's College with a BA in philosophy, but they didn't dare let you teach that in high schools. Prior to attending teacher's college, I spent a year in the school of physical and health education. To be honest, I couldn't think of anything better to do. Work on the family farm was no longer an option.

I was enrolled in the Faculty of Education at the U of T, where I was working toward secondary school teaching certificates in physical education and English lit. Everyone said I had to do something useful to earn a living. All this was a step in the right direction, I hoped. I figured if all else failed, I could always go kicking and screaming into teaching school as a backup. A bad faith default strategy if ever there was one. The truth is, my dream ever since I was fifteen was to have the letters "PhD" printed after my name. More than anything else I wanted to become a full-fledged academic. Dream on, dream on, Herr Doktor Professor. I wanted to be one of the gladiators who teaches the gladiators to be gladiators. Or was I destined to be just another

twenty-something “hippie with a pipedream”? I didn’t know. I’d heard that phrase so often I thought that’s what everyone said as a way of daunting my guileless desires.

In the meantime, while I waited to hear the sirens’ call and for my fate to unfold, I got by on a family allowance. Plus what I scraped together as grad assistant to head track and field Coach Andy Higgins and school of physical education Professor Bruce Kidd. Call it an honorarium with special treatments. Andy and Bruce were grooming a few former jocks like me with a view to some of us coaching athletics as a profession. I for one was pretty sure of who, where, and what I wanted to be—only which road to take wasn’t so obvious.

One subsidy of having a job in athletics was that it kept me in pretty good shape for the most part. Being strong and resilient was an asset to me when this whole thing got started. Otherwise I may have quit early on.

The university was partly closed down for the holiday. But I had obligations later that day to work with Andy and some of the athletes. He said to meet him at his office in Hart House around 8:30 a.m. to discuss plans for the upcoming spring training camp. Afterwards, I had a timed interval workout session to conduct with a group of sprinters at the indoor track inside the Princes’ Gates down by the lakeshore.

My apartment in the annex at 175 Madison Avenue was a mile from the campus. I drank a mug of hot Ovaltine, downed three or four aspirin, and jogged to the back campus in less than six minutes—all without breaking a sweat. My body may have been sharp as a razor’s edge, but my mind was as blunt as my heart.

Hart House is at the heart of the downtown University of Toronto campus. It’s the student activity center for music, theater arts, and athletics. The building itself is a Gothic-collegiate structure built around an interior quadrangle where some of us hippies played fantasy football in all weathers and at odd hours. Inside its stone vaulted ceilings and stained glass windows there’s even a stunning art deco swimming pool, and a suspended indoor running track with banking as steep as the Autodromo Monza once was.

The varsity coaches’ offices were all on the second floor overlooking the back campus and Morrison Hall. My poor start made me a few minutes late. I could hear laughter and chatter coming from inside as I stepped out of the stairwell, stomping the slush off my Adidas. There were three men talking and drinking coffee out of beige Tim Horton’s cups. I saluted my comrades and sat down at a lone cluttered desk in the corner.

Andy pointed to which cup was mine and I helped myself to half

the remaining croissant. Everyone else in the room was an Olympian, with the exception of yours truly. We'd all known one another for a very long time. My other two friends were pole-vaulter Bruce Simpson and sprinter Jim 'Buck' Buchanan. Thankfully, given the hung-over state I was in, they seemed to be talking about something familiar.

The Canadian Olympic track and field training camp the previous spring had been held in Long Beach, California. That was just two months prior to Bruce and Buck competing at the Games of the XXI Olympiad in Montreal. We were headquartered at the Cal State Long Beach athletic center for the whole month of May. Andy was one of our national coaches and I tagged along to assist him. Mostly I ran back the discus for decathlete Gordie Stewart, and put the bar back up on the standards for high jumper Louise Walker whenever she knocked it down. Ostensibly, I was there to learn all I could about high performance coaching at the Olympic level. Not a bad gig if you could get a spot on the ladder. But I wasn't sure that's what I wanted.

The place where we stayed in Long Beach was called the Golden Sails Hotel. On the surface this sounded majestic.

"They named the place 'Palm Beach,' right?" Buck was saying. "I remember our balcony held a *spectacular* view of the highways and parking lots."

"Right beside an endless landscape of oil pumps and refineries," Andy added. Turning to me he said, "We've been discussing where we might camp in the spring."

"Just so long as it's somewhere with competitive meets," said Bruce.

"Just so long as it's somewhere sunny and warm," Buck responded. "How 'bout Hawaii?"

Fading in and out (but trying my best to keep the others' words and expressions in focus), I said, "I wouldn't mind if we went back to LA. There were plenty of good meets and interesting stuff to do all the time..."

"And the weather's great," said Buck.

"LA...maybe," said Andy. "But I don't think we want to go back to Long Beach. I'd prefer Malibu or Santa Barbara."

"That's a long way to go to find the right competition," Bruce reminded everyone. I grew ever more bored with this conversation, so I wandered off.

I drifted off into daydreams of Long Beach again. Even the words "Long Beach" recalled to mind a *severe* ankle sprain I suffered the first week we were there. Thinking of that made me cringe. No one noticed. But that extrasensory event brought to mind my old girlfriend

Tricia, who came down from Santa Monica to care for me while I mended. Thinking of Trish just then made me smile. Feeling self-conscious, I pretended to be paying attention to whatever else these guys were still talking about.

Tricia Woodbridge was a beautiful twenty-year-old girl when I met her. She had one green eye and one speckled brown. Her hair was strawberry blonde, and her legs were interminably long. That wasn't all I liked about her, but it sure helped a lot. After I'd torn every blood vessel I had left in my ankle, Trish (who was a registered nurse) helped me recover in more ways than one. She fed me fresh fruit and salads, bathed me in hot tubs of Epsom salts, and brought me lots of good books to read while I tanned by the poolside.

In the evenings we got high on pot and sparkling wine, listened to music, and cuddled up under blankets while we purred like a couple of panthers. There had been a kind of a yagé tableau-déjà vu taking place in my mind's eye—when all of a sudden everyone's laughter brought my free-floating consciousness back to the office.

"I'd been going to UCLA for four months already," Bruce began. "Before I looked up one day and actually saw the San Gabriel Mountains for the very first time. I didn't know they were there. Then one morning a storm came through the basin and blew all the smog out over the ocean. Suddenly there were mountains!" Everyone laughed, knowing exactly what he was getting at. Paradise smudged. Soon after that Bruce and Andy switched subjects. I don't remember what that was about.

What I do recall is Buck leaning in and asking, "Hey Pete, whatever happened to that girlfriend of yours? The tall redhead in California."

"What a coincidence," I said. "You must be clairvoyant. No kidding…I was *just* thinking about Trish myself…you mean Tricia Woodbridge."

"That's the one. The pretty nurse with the freckles," Buck smiled. "Heard from her lately?"

"It's strange you're asking that now—that's what I was just thinking about. Don't you love it when this sort of thing happens?"

"When what sort of thing happens?" Buck grinned. "It's not really so strange. We were talking about memories of the Golden Sails after all. You lucky dog."

I laughed. And then, thinking things over, I frowned. "Ah, Trish. I don't know. Haven't heard. In fact, the way we left things wasn't so hot. She told me she felt that we used her…you know, as private nurse and taxi service. Then we dropped her."

“That wasn’t polite. But don’t let disgrace dampen your spirits,” he said. “I’m sure you’ll be forgiven. She liked you a lot.”

“I hope so,” I said, drifting off again.

“Why don’t you write her?”

“I know who you’re talking about,” Andy jumped in. “*We* didn’t use her, Peter. *You* did. Speak for yourself. If she’s the one I think you’re talking about, she was a pest. She got in our way at the track *and* the hotel? We were supposed to be there to work, remember?”

“Well,” I said, “*we* did call her up whenever *we* were stuck for a ride. I know it turned into a bit of a holiday for me, Andy. I’m sorry. If I messed things up, you can blame me for that. It wasn’t her fault. So please don’t go trashing my more noble distractions.” Everyone, including me, laughed at how absurd all of that sounded. Even on the residual effects of the previous night’s psilocybin, I thought, which remained in my bloodstream.

“You needn’t be so defensive,” Andy said. “What’s wrong? Lighten up.”

But I carried on all the same.

“Yeah well…you needn’t be such a grump either, you know. I like Trish. I think she’s hot. So does Buck.”

Buck nodded in agreement.

“She tried to help out and showed us around LA. Peter’s right. She was a good sport, and, judging by the look of him, she had to put up with a lot.”

I continued the fore-check.

“In fact,” I said, “it was Trish who took us to that bookshop you liked so much, Andy. The one in the Westminster Mall.” Andy just shrugged and looked out the window. The snow was still coming down.

I didn’t stop. “The one where you were so happy you found a copy of Auden’s *A Certain World*,” I said. “I remember that clearly. Because that was the same day Trish made me a present of Bugliosi’s book, *Helter Skelter*. Have you read it?”

Andy looked decidedly bored. But that didn’t discourage me in the slightest.

“It took me days to read,” I pressed on. “But I couldn’t put it down.”

Looking at Buck, I asked him, “Do you remember when we kept Gord Stewart’s rental? That Mustang convertible? You, me, Dave Watt and Louise Walker—we went driving around Bel Air with the top down…”

“Right. You took us to see the places where those Manson murders

happened. You had the maps in your book." Buck was enthused, so I soldiered on.

"We *eventually* found the gate at the end of a cul-de-sac way up Benedict Canyon," I remembered.

"You couldn't see the house from the road," Buck said, "but you could tell that the hillside was haunted."

The others were rolling their eyes.

"Let's change the subject," said Andy. You could tell he'd been patient enough. Cynically, he added, "If it's blood you want to look at, let me show you the sink where I cut myself shaving."

Then, he changed the subject.

"Look, I have a meeting to go to with Gerard Mach. You all have work to do. I'll see you at the track after lunch." Then looking directly at me, he added, "You want to go with them or wait up so we can talk later?"

"Sure, I'll wait," I said, tossing paper cups into the trashcan. "I'll be down at the end of the hall in the library. I can work there until you get back."

So, I took my schedules and notebooks to my favorite bay window enclave and pretended.

For a while I just lay there staring out at the college circle, watching pedestrians dodging the gauntlet of traffic in back of Queen's Park. There was an attractive brunette sitting on one of the ox-blood leather library couches. When she got up to leave, she left pages of yesterday's *Toronto Star* scattered behind her. I gathered them up and tossed the business section and advertisements in the wastebasket. Then I went back to my cubbyhole and arched on my forearms to read the more interesting parts of the paper.

The second I turned the page to A-13—Tuesday, December 28th 1976—it felt like my breathing had stopped. So what if it was just another random coincidence? It still mattered. Time is infinite after all. To me, this experience was more akin to Jung's concept of *Synchronicity*.

Printed above the caption headed: "**Ex-Manson girl returns to court with new image.**" "Then and now" photographs of Leslie Van Houten captivated all my attention. The image on the left was of Leslie *then*, in 1971, with her head shaved and a scared "X" carved into her forehead—pure madness. But the picture on the right was of the ex-Manson girl *now*, neatly dressed with dark bangs and hair that hung straight down to her shoulders. Even though she looked understandably weary and worn, I found the picture of the *now* Leslie alluring.

The six-paragraph column reported that Ms. Van Houten had entered a plea of “not guilty” for the August 9, 1969 slaying of Leno and Rosemary LaBianca. Her previous conviction for first-degree murder in 1971 had been overturned. The court felt she should never have been tried alongside Charles Manson and his co-conspirators in the first place. Since Ronald Hughes, her lawyer at the time of the first trial had died during the original proceedings, his replacement, Maxwell Keith, didn’t have adequate time to prepare a defense. The California Court of Appeals ordered a new trial on grounds that she hadn’t been properly represented the first time. That was a new twist to the story.

I folded the page from the paper, tucked it away in my notebook, and wrote down the name of her lawyer. Hours later in the day after indoor track practice at the CNE, Andy tried (though in vain) to have a serious conversation with me about my career in teaching and coaching. But he could see how distracted I was. Whatever he suspected the reasons for this were, I never revealed them. I simply went with the flow, as they say, and ducked away early to stop by the Robarts Library on my way home. I’d gone there to look up the mailing address of Maxwell S. Keith, Attorney-at-Law, in the City of Los Angeles telephone directory.

Eager to get back to my flat and dig right in to the copy of Vincent Bugliosi and Curt Gentry’s *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders* that Tricia gave me—I brewed a full French press’ worth of coffee to help me get started. It took me a couple hours and three joints of marijuana to highlight all eighty-five pages with reference to Leslie Van Houten in the index. I intuitively thought Mr. Bugliosi’s depiction of her was inexplicably wrong. Plainly, she was a special case that should have been tried apart from the others. And, although the grand inquisitor seems to have gone out of his way to paint each of the co-defendants with the same blood, what he had to say about Leslie just didn’t add up.

From the newspaper photo of her, I sensed something sincere and profound about Leslie. I wanted—I needed—I found myself yearning to find out what the truth was. Besides the physical evidence found at the crime scene, just exactly what happened still wasn’t clear from Bugliosi’s account. It seemed to me he based his suppositions on the hearsay of others who hadn’t been there. Frustrated by his logical fallacies and inconsistencies, I put the book down and closed it. Surely there had to be better explanations that I could get my hands on? I felt the need to find out what it was about Leslie Van Houten’s vulnerability and mistaken identity that I so strongly connected with.

And why didn't the so-called definitive account by Bugliosi and Gentry not ring true entirely? One should never ignore one's instincts or intuition.

Images of what the now Leslie Van Houten might be like raised in scenes from inside my head. Rather than wrestle and box with my blankets and pillows, I finally gave in to the muse and stayed up half the night writing pages of notes and questions for Leslie. I addressed the envelope c/o Mr. Maxwell S. Keith, Lawyer, Security Pacific Plaza, #2820 - 333 South Hope Street, Los Angeles, California 90071. No sooner had I sealed the first letter, then I immediately started another.

I wasn't writing to the girl with the 'X' on her forehead. I was writing to the beautiful young woman with the dark hair, pouty lips, and wide-eyed good looks. When I read about Leslie getting her second chance to be free of that madness, I felt duty-bound to let her in on my own journey for freedom and independence. I felt sure she'd have one hell of a story to tell if I met her. Try as I might, I could not fall asleep right away. This was my second restless night in a row. I cut out the newspaper photo of Leslie and propped it up on my desk where I could readily see it. When I woke up in the morning, the first thing I did was to re-read the "**Ex-Manson Girl Returns to Court with New Image**" *Toronto Star* clipping, then reviewed the "then and now" photos and dog-eared pages from *Helter Skelter*.

I had the distinct, hedonic sense that I was about to seduce somebody famous.

2

LOVERS AND LESSER MEN

It's been suggested that if you awaken slowly, you will have a better chance of recalling your dreams than if you are awakened by alarm clocks or explosions. Monday morning, the second week of the New Year, I awoke to a phenomenon meteorologists call "thunder snow." Temperature and turbulence pelted gobs of wet snow at wind gusts up to ninety kilometers an hour. Positive and negative electrical charges divorce and lightning bolts even the difference. *Krrrack*—an' *kapow*! You've got to love being awakened by sonic booms that rattle the windowpanes—with flashes of light hotter than the sun's surface.

I was already practiced at writing my dreams down and could sometimes record three or four at a time. In my last dream that morning, I started out with a female stranger for a companion. Then she became the familiar image, more-or-less, of my steady girlfriend Gabrielle Adler. In this dream, Gabe, and who or what I assumed to be "*me*," started out house hunting late at night. Every place we looked at resembled a bombed-out ruin, like the set for a production of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*. Wrecked cats and stray dogs, but also less savory primates, inhabited the neighborhoods we were lost in. Lightning struck and the rest—whatever it might have been or become—never happened.

Dream traces fade quickly, don't they? That's why I scribbled mine down in a diary. I had to force myself to scratch them out right away upon waking, before they evaporated back into the ether they came from. I finished my notes, rolled a couple of extra joints to keep for later on in the car, and turned to CHUM-FM on the radio. They were playing Fleetwood Mac's "Dreams." I've always loved that song. It gave notice to the fact that love affairs are sure to blow up in your

face at one point or another.

Lines like “Dreams unwind, love’s a state of mind…” I saw as bases for a new kind of theoretical physics. Romances collapse all the time, or so I would have liked to believe. Whatever doubts I had about most things, I pretended to hold no illusions about the nature of things between men and women. Only that wasn’t true. Deep down at the core I was a romantic. I’d soon have to face up to the cold fact of that “deep perfection.”

My apartment on Madison Avenue was on the second floor of an old red brick mansion with two great stone arches out front. It was still very early. I smoked a joint on the porch and quickly finished my latté. *Brrrr*…it was cold. The wind, the sleet, and the snow changed my mind about going for a morning run. Instead I went back inside to continue my newfound obsession with Leslie Van Houten—marking up pages of *Helter Skelter* with a highlighter and making pencil notes in the margins.

Hated having to put her aside and ready myself for work. This was the second week of my “practice teaching” assignments that term. This stint was at the Stephen Leacock Collegiate Institute in Scarborough. (One of the requisite hoops one had to jump through to obtain an English teaching certificate in the province of Ontario.) I’d already spent the first week of this duty “observing” my supervising teacher demonstrate how teaching was done in this jurisdiction. I put on a costume of navy blues (cotton button-down shirt under a wool pull-over sweater), black slacks, and shoes.

I packed my books and workout gear in separate bags and carried everything out to the car. I kept my things up front on the floor by the heater vents instead of the jump seat. Cold damp air made the car hard to start. Once she did fire up, I turned the heater on full tilt and got out to scrape the slush off the windshield and windows. It took a while for the MG to warm up, so I sat in the cockpit looking over my notes. The class on *Macbeth* I had down cold—having done it a dozen times before. But what I had enthusiastically planned for the day’s lessons on contemporary poets was sure to be something out of the ordinary.

Stephen Leacock Collegiate is on Birchmount Avenue, right across from the Tam O’Shanter Golf Club. It was a typical suburban, middle-class jigsaw of concrete slabs with a few narrow windows for looking out of. Like a lot of high schools built in the seventies, it wouldn’t be hard to imagine the place as a penitentiary. All a film crew would need are a thousand yards of razor wire for the fencing, a few painted signs for the cages, and badges to sew on to the guards’ uniforms. In

any case, the flags waving out front by the drive-thru entrance could stay the same and no one would notice a difference.

My supervisor at Leacock was a woman named Cynthia Kressler. She looked kind of cute in that tame, unadventurous way some women have, which is presumably why I didn't take closer notice. In sum, my first impression of her was that she was honest and smart. I wondered what she thought of me. Very soon I'd find out.

She told me she'd been teaching English at Leacock for a couple of years and finally felt settled in. The first week, I watched her teach classes on *Macbeth* and Mordecai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. She was okay. Although in my estimation she gave Duddy's character too much credit for just being clever. The second week it was my turn to handle one or two classes a day so that Kressler could complete a formal evaluation of my teaching. Without your supervising teacher's okay you were usually toast in terms of finding a job in the province. The outfit could chew you up and spit you out if they wanted. They kept a surplus of rookie teachers for exactly that purpose.

I'd reached a deal with Cynthia to put Richler's *Duddy Kravitz* on hold. In place of that, she was letting me teach this series of lessons on "Canadian ballads and verse." That day, I thought I would introduce the class to Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen, if they didn't already know of their work. It wasn't an academic lesson as such—more a demonstration of theater than theory—something I felt sure would interest several of these students.

"It's not in the board's curriculum guidelines. But I guess it's okay if you try it," Cynthia counseled.

All I told her was that I planned to read a selection from *The Energy of Slaves* and *Lovers and Lesser Men* and discuss them. These were two of my personal favorite books of poems at the time. Something for which I had a real passion. I went into the classroom a stranger that day, feeling sure I would leave hoisted on the shoulders of the crowd. The class was sure to be shouting, perhaps cheering, or so I imagined. I'd structured the lesson to end with a bang not a whimper. Paraphrasing Irving Layton, I ended with thunder.

"Wilder and wilder I sang…and my loins wrinkled like the brow of a sage."

I meant it to be a romantic anthem of wisdom and fun. No such luck.

Some gasps, some laughter, and a few not wholly unfriendly groans. It was the quiet ones you needed to watch for. Soon the bell rang to end the first round. I could see from her expression that Ms.

Kressler wasn't happy. She curled her finger towards her and led me straight to her office. She closed the door, pointed to an empty chair, slapped her notebook on the desk and sat down with a thump. I remained standing and waited for her to draw the first blood.

She asked, "Won't you sit?"

I didn't respond but rocked back and forth on my heels and my toes. If I didn't like what she was saying, I could always make a break for it. I was already poised and waiting for her to release me.

"Clearly, you have a narcissistic thirst for showing off, don't you, Mr. Chiaramonte?" she said, pausing to catch her breath between syllables.

She nodded toward the vacant chair once more and this time I sat, but not politely. At this point, I wasn't so much angry as hurt.

Flipping the pages of her notes, she added, "Peter, you are obviously a competent and charming teacher. But you have to be careful how you present yourself to these kids. And the material, my goodness. That was reckless. It wasn't approved. Some of the girls looked practically frightened."

"More than half the class seemed to like it," I defended. "I'm sure they know satire when they hear it. Why not give me a break?"

Admittedly, this was a pitifully rude remark. Lame defense. An unlikely tactic for gaining much ground with authority. Yet that's where my impulses led, and I followed out of some remote instinct.

"You *shocked* them. The whole class. And 'half' is not the point. One of the girls—this isn't funny!" she snapped.

I had started to smile, having taken that last remark as a compliment. But then I snapped back.

"Why then were so many kids nodding 'yes' and smiling? There was occasional laughter. Or was I imagining that?"

"Because that's what kids *do* when they're nervous!"

"Yes," I said. "And the reason they're nervous is why I read them these particular poems in the first place."

Cynthia put both palms flat down on her desk.

"You really think this is funny? The job isn't to make students laugh."

Pause. I wasn't laughing.

"I'm late for a meeting," she said. "We'll talk after school. Please choose some…some other poems for this afternoon's class. How about let's have more ballads and less raunch, shall we?"

She didn't look up, which I happily took as my cue to leave.

I walked through the halls like a recreational skater cutting clockwise against the flow of students and teachers moving half as fast

in the opposite direction. I had nearly two hours to spare over lunch, so I grabbed a bowl of chili and crackers in the teachers' lounge, put my feet up, and tried to forget all about how Leonard Cohen's "Portrait of a Girl" was received by the class overall.

Fooling myself into believing I wanted to be alone, I picked a table in the farthest corner of the teachers' lounge away from the smokers and those I assumed to be cheating at cards. I continued reading Bugliosi's book and taking notes about Leslie Van Houten to get my mind off the energy of slaves run amok. 'Wrong poems for this crowd,' I wrote in my diary.

It wasn't too long before another student-teacher doing time at Leacock Collegiate—a cool-looking guy I'd seen around the Faculty of Education building downtown at the U of T campus—asked to sit down and join me. His name was Jean Cousineau, and he offered me one of the honey crullers he had in a box. He said they were fresh, but I said no thanks to the donuts.

Jean had dark wavy hair pulled back tight in a ponytail and a classic Frenchman's nose that reminded me of a young Yves Montand. He was wearing an open white shirt with denim Levis and had on one of those awful Harris Tweed blazers you often saw teachers wear in the movies. He said he was practice teaching French language and literature all term. I asked him how it was going.

"This place is more-or-less the same as the others," he said with a shrug. Then he asked, "How do you like it here?" I frowned at first and kept my book open.

"Not exactly having the time of my life," I said. "I more-or-less hate it."

Right away Jean recognized what I was reading and asked me, "What's your interest in Manson?"

"Not Manson so much. Rather Leslie Van Houten. She's more interesting than Manson or Bugliosi and much better looking." I felt myself smiling for the first time since class ended.

"Van Houten. The cheerleader…the pretty one, right? No. Not the cheerleader…the homecoming *princess*. That's right. What's your interest in her?"

I pursed my lips and frowned. I suddenly felt a tinge wary and jealous thinking he might know as much or more about Leslie than I did.

He asked instead, "What's your take on Charlie Manson? A creep, eh?" An easy presumption.

"Yeah, I guess."

"They should've executed that goof with a maul and punch

hammer," he said very matter-of-factly.

I put the book down and invited Jean to keep talking. We seemed to hit it off well enough. It was good to make contact. We discussed everything at a rate of a hundred miles per hour—*Helter Skelter*, The Beatles, Sharon Tate, LSD, *Rosemary's Baby*, Polanski, sodium pentothal, deep hypnosis, Albert Camus, Aleister Crowley, *Siddhartha*, astral projection, Terry Melcher, and Dennis Wilson. It turned out Jean knew more about Manson than I did. But I had him beat on The Beatles and Roman Polanski.

"You know," Jean said, "*all* the Manson girls gave themselves over to Charlie completely. They were primarily a sex and drugs cult. My take on the case is he perverted their minds with acid and orgies to the point that they no longer had any will of their own. He knew what he was doing. You bet. He's one ugly monster."

I agreed with all that, but let Jean carry on.

"I have a buddy...a writer," he said, "who knows a lot about the whole gory fiasco. He told me something over a month ago…what was it? I didn't realize at the time. He might have been talking about the retrial of Leslie Van Houten. I'll remember to ask him.

"By the way, do you know? The judge upheld his ruling against all the others, including Manson of course. They still stand convicted of first-degree murder. That's what I heard. All except her."

"Yes, I've read that in the papers," I said. "From what Bugliosi acknowledged the first time, Leslie had been no more than a 'mindless robot.' So how could she plot first-degree murder? It never made sense to try her alongside the others. She didn't kill anyone."

"Did you know she's going to be getting married? Yeah. Some ex-con who publishes books by other convicts in prison. 'Prose From Prison' or something like that."

I cringed when I heard this news of a rival but tried not to show it. After another long pause, Jean continued.

"She wasn't there the first night at the Tate house, was she? Just the LaBiancas'. If she'd testified against Manson, she'd have gotten the same deal they gave to Kasabian. She'd have gotten off. Why'd she turn that one down, I wonder?"

"I'll ask her," I said, showing off. Feeling careless in general, I went on to blurt out, "I've written her a letter care of her lawyer, in fact. I'll write another and ask her."

"Really? Has she written back?"

"Only just sent it."

"What did you write her about, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Told her I'd read about her retrial in the paper. Wished her luck

and expressed my support. You know, that sort of stuff. Plus, I think she's a fall-down, beautiful-looking girl. And there's something about what happened to her I identify with..."

"You said all that in a letter?"

After a pause, I admitted, "What I said was that I thought what happened to her could have happened to me...or just about anyone else under similar circumstances."

Jean said he had to leave right away to meet with his "associate." Either way, that last bit sure shut him up. Both he and I had afternoon classes to teach. So, after he finished the last of his coffee, he got up to leave.

We promised to meet up again soon. I'd see him around. And, since I still had a little more time left to myself before my next class, I drifted back to Vincent Bugliosi's opening statement from the Manson trial. Something about it wasn't right by a long shot.

* * *

On behalf of the people of the state of California, Deputy District Attorney Vincent Bugliosi stated that Charles Manson was the dictatorial leader of the Manson Family; everyone was slavishly obedient to him; he always had other members do his bidding for him; and he ordered followers to commit the Tate-LaBianca murders on command.

In his opening statement in 1970, the Deputy DA is quoted as saying, "Manson's total domination over the Family will be offered as circumstantial evidence that on the two nights in question it was he and he alone who ordered these seven murders." *He and he alone.*

Then why so insistent on executing all the others, including Leslie?

Vincent Bugliosi portrayed Leslie Van Houten as an indoctrinated robot driven savagely out of her mind by the Devil incarnate. And, at the same time, he depicted her as a free-willed individual, acting with logic, cunning and the cruelest prevision imaginable. Double bind or double blind? I for one was cross-eyed by the Deputy DA's circular logic. The jury may have been duped, but not others. (Bugliosi ran for Los Angeles District Attorney in 1972 and 1976 and lost both times.)

Even the courts were temperate enough to wade through his bullshit without getting their feet wet. On February 18th 1972, the California Supreme Court voted six to one to abolish the death penalty. The Manson murderers' sentences were reduced to life in prison *with* the possibility of parole. That's what the law said. Something about cruel and unusual punishment. I wondered what the

law had to say about psychosis and premeditation.

With so much evidence to support Manson's domination over the others, I didn't understand how the prosecution could find Leslie responsible to the degree she was charged. One of the prosecutor's expert witnesses testified that the easiest way to program someone to murder is to use fear. Convince them that "others" are threats that must be stopped, or else they'll eat your babies. Furthermore, Mr. Bugliosi discussed the ways Manson used fear to make his followers' sense of themselves disappear, so he could replace their will with his own. In fact, Bugliosi admitted, "Whether he perfected this technique in prison or later is not known, but it was one of his most effective tools for controlling others."

Had Leslie been at the LaBiancas? Yes. Did she struggle with Rosemary LaBianca? Yes as well. But to what extent had she willfully and meaningfully taken part in her murder still wasn't clear from physical evidence or previous testimony. That was all *madness*. Therefore, there had to be mitigating factors. And Mr. Bugliosi's interpretation also seemed to be warped, hollow, and fairly unfinished. In other words, *sketchy*.

* * *

The time came for me to start packing my gear and head off to teach another round of Canadian poetry. Time to put Leslie Van Houten aside for the moment. If one wanted to become a tenured academic one day, you had to start aiming to teach something to somebody somewhere. Whenever the opportunity presented itself, I felt compelled to give it a try. I figured I'd come this far already and was close to getting my ticket stamped, whether I wanted to use it or not.

When time was up and class let out, I noticed a scrum of three or four of the girls gathering in the hall outside the classroom. Ms. Kressler had already vanished with two other students in tow. This gaggle stood away from the door where everyone else was passing. Finally, one student stepped forward, clearing her throat. Her first name was Donna. The only word I understood at first was that I was "wrong."

"I'm often 'wrong' about many things, Ms. Reed," I said. Then gave a smile over her shoulder to the group that had gathered around. "What is it this time?"

"Just wrong!" she resounded. After a pause, she added, "And I'm not coming to class if you're going to keep reading poems like you...like the things you said. Poems like that."

This last bit came out all at once but still sounded fractured.

"Poems like what?" I taunted. "Which ones offend your fine sensibilities?"

My tone wasn't polite or very professional, however that sounds. I kept hoping she'd get quiet and back down, only she didn't.

Donna suddenly wasn't so shaken as she was only moments before. She glanced around at the others who stood staring from nearby their lockers. Then she spoke very clearly, looking me straight in the eye.

"Leonard Cohen, Mordecai Richler, *and* Irving Layton. They all used women and then bragged about it," she protested. "Their poems are sick, filthy *and* vulgar. Bragging about...about having sex with fifteen-year-old girls. It's disgusting! We've complained to Ms. Kressler. Just want to warn you. I'm telling my parents when I get home."

It seems Donna was becoming accustomed to the adrenalin in her bloodstream. Feeling outmatched and exposed, I waited as long as I could before firing back. Nothing but bitterness burned at the edge of my tongue. It's fair to say I was naïve and in deep, over my head.

Tangled up with a frustrated temper I said, "I'm sorry you didn't like the poems. But these are well-respected poets and you can't blame *me* for Mordecai Richler. Pin that dud on Kressler. The poems are legit and that's how I presented them.

"Tell you what, though Donna. Why not take a spare next time I'm teaching and save both of us from wasting our time?"

Right as I said this, I wished that I hadn't. But I kept on talking anyway. It must have come out worse than I thought. Ms. Donna Reed broke into tears and then she and her mob shuffled away among echoes of crying.

Acting calm, though I wasn't, I walked out the nearest door like Michael Corleone leaving the restaurant from where he'd just shot Sollozzo, and I headed straight for my car. The MGB started right up, and I drove away without warming the engine. That's not like me at all. I needed to think more clearly but didn't know where I might gainfully start. Now wasn't the time for strategic thinking. I lit up a joint to think things through and drove along Sheppard Avenue toward the Don Valley Parkway, still feeling anxious.

Traffic was stacked up as usual, until I turned off at Bayview. The road was bumpy and wet. I got the car a bit bent out of shape braking late at the entry to Rosedale Valley Road. A twitch left and then right around slow pokes let me expend some aggression. I still hadn't quite settled down, narrowly missing some oncoming traffic racing through two miles of blind winding corners. It only seemed right to take a few

chances.

I parked in the lot across from Varsity Stadium beside St. Hilda's College. From there, I jogged the rest of the way to Hart House looking for Andy Higgins. He wasn't at the track office, in the weight room, or by the lockers. I searched each face in the Arbor Room. All without luck.

"Absence haunts the café," said Jean-Paul Sartre.

I was just about to give up and go find a couch in the library to crash on, when I spotted Andy coming out the archway of University College. He stopped and waited as I sauntered up.

3

THE DIABLOS CAFÉ

Andy suggested we go inside to stay warm. The Diablos Café lies hidden beneath a labyrinth of corridors and stone spiral stairwells, deep inside the main quadrangle of University College. When I was a kid living less than a mile away on Yonge Street, I used to sneak off to go there alone. Under floodlights at night, with its pointed arches and flying buttresses, UC looked just like a Disneyland castle. Legend has it that, during its construction in the 1850s, a Russian stonemason named Ivan Reznikoff was courting a beddable debutante with family ties to the city. The young lady was also seeing another of the masons, a Greek immigrant named Paul Diablos. According to Toronto folklore, Mr. Diablos carved one of two of the gargoyles adorning the college in the image of Reznikoff. The other was of himself, laughing behind poor Ivan's back.

When Reznikoff uncovered proof of his girlfriend's infidelity, he confronted his rival near the construction site with an axe. Reznikoff chased Diablos through the unfinished tower, leaving a scar on the door that remains visible to this day. Afterwards, both of the men and the young lady mysteriously vanished from Toronto. Decades later, after a fire in 1890 severely damaged the college library, the corpse of a man was unearthed in the debris. Although these sorry remains were never identified, the gargoyle hasn't stopped laughing.

So it was into the dark but illustrious confines of the Diablos Café that Andy and I descended. We each ordered coffee, and he sat down while I waited. He'd chosen a point away far from the madding crowd in the corner of the large open room.

Cradling a pint of hot coffee, Andy asked, "So what's this about?"

I held up my hand, shook my head and remained silent a moment while I swallowed.

“Tell me what hap-pened,” he said, in the curious way he had of emphasizing certain words by elongating their syllables.

“I had a complaint from a student today who got defensive and lost it,” I said.

Pinching my shoulder with his palm, Andy spoke softly, “Lost it how? Was this about teaching or something else?”

“After class. I was trying to do something different with an intro to Canadian poets. I’d planned a lesson on Irving Layton’s notion of ‘poetry as the fine art of pugilism.’ I wanted students to connect with something current in place of good ol’ E.J. Pratt and Bliss Carman. But some of the girls said they were offended by the sexual satire expressed by these younger poets.”

“What did your supervisor have to say about sexual satire?”

“I don’t know. I split in a hurry. Never hung around long enough to find out. That’s one of the things I wanted to talk to you about. More than ever, I’m convinced teaching high school isn’t for me. Do I stop wasting my time or fake it for a few weeks longer ’til I get the certificate stamped?”

Andy leaned back and said, “You know what they say? First you have to be part of the system before you can start trying to change things.”

I moaned when he said it. I’d heard that so often it was all I could do not to yawn. No wonder nothing ever gets done.

“Everyone says that, don’t they? I’m not trying to change things, Andy. There’s no room for anything even *remotely* current in this whole wearied curriculum. No wonder they have Bliss Carmen putting everyone’s feet to sleep.”

“It’s not meant to be cutting edge,” Andy explained. “They expect you to teach what’s well-established. That’s all. You have to prove you can do that before you go off on a tangent.”

“From what I’ve seen in the system so far, they only teach what they’ve been taught. There’s nothing new or self-taught about it. Why keep folks like Holt and Summerhill on the shelves if we’re going to ignore them? If teachers were force-fed *To Kill a Mockingbird* in grade nine, then that’s what *and how* they teach when it’s their turn.”

Andy asked, “What were the *students* complaining about?”

“Some of the poems I chose. Probing and poking some fun at uptight sexual mores and prudish behavior…”

“Which poems are we talking about?”

“Leonard Cohen and Irving Layton…some early Mark Strand. Mostly poems about poetry. You know. ‘Where are the poems that led me away from everything I loved…’ That sort of thing. Poems about

love, sex, and art…*some* of the kids were impressed and turned on."

"Then, that can't be what they complained about," he said, shaking his head. "What else did you say?"

"I read them some tongue-in-cheek stuff like: 'the 15-year-old girls I wanted when I was 15.' Honestly, Andy, I thought that was the *perfect* poem to read to fifteen-year-olds. Only it seems that has gotten some girls' skirts in a twist."

Andy said nothing at first but frowned at *my* smiling.

"That will sure enhance your credibility with the administration," he quipped, before breaking a smile of his own.

"I considered it a 'teachable moment'," I defended.

We relaxed after that and moved on to other matters.

Andy said, "I had another meeting with Gerard Mach today and one of the things we discussed was you. Mach has agreed to you working with his group of sprinters and coaches this summer. It's up to you. But if you want to continue to coach at this level, then this is the next step."

"I know it's a great chance to learn more about sprinting and bring that back to the club," I said. "But that's a commitment of time I'm not sure I can afford. Which is why, I guess, I should try and *not* wipe out with the teaching. I have to find ways of paying for grad school."

Andy put his coffee cup down.

"This could be a once in a lifetime chance to work with a *master* athletics' coach. Think about that for a moment. And by bringing that back to the team you'd be taking a step forward to becoming a specialist in the fine art of sprinting."

"That's not exactly a part-time job," I said.

"It's what you make it."

Now there was a thought.

Gerard Mach had been an Olympic sprinter prior to becoming Poland's national coach. He became the first "professional" track coach in Canada in 1972 and, by 1976, had coached all four of our national relay teams to the Olympic finals in Montreal. All of that was a plus. One reason I held back my enthusiasm for what Andy was suggesting had to do with the fact that he had me working with other legendary coaches before. In those days, we called it the *generation gap*, but that phrase didn't quite capture the deep divide between me and Mr. Fred Foot, another of Andy's mentors.

Andy and I talked some more about teaching and coaching as complementary professions. Rather than treat them both as separate endeavors, he suggested I think of more creative ways of putting them both together. Since it was nearly quarter past four and soon it would

be time for us to head up to the gym to workout a dozen athletes, I decided on another coffee for myself. Andy shook his head 'no thanks' just as someone he knew stopped over to have a chat. I got up and ordered myself a double shot of espresso.

While standing in line at the counter, I was surprised by who walked up from behind.

"Hey Peter," he said.

I turned around and smiled broadly, sincerely happy to see Jean Cousineau again the same day we had met.

"Small world," I said.

"No, not really. It's a big world, Pierre. It's a small café. The odds were good I'd run into you someplace like this."

"I see what you mean," I said glancing around, only I wasn't so sure.

When I thought more about it, I wondered if maybe I'd seen him in here before. In those days, you needed an initiation (almost) to find your way to the Diablos Café. Many thought the place wasn't as real as the metaphor.

"I'm having one more shot for the road, then heading off to workout at the gym...Faculty of Ed. building...at Huron and Washington Park."

"That's a coincidence," Jean said. "I'm going that way myself. I'm late for a meeting with my advisor."

"Can you wait a few minutes? We can jog up together."

"Not unless you can leave this very second. I was just running out the door when I saw you," he said.

"Why not hang around and meet up with me later? If you want, we can take a pizza back to my place. I live up the street on Madison. How does that sound? You can tell me more about Charles Manson and Leslie Van Houten."

"Pizza sounds cool. See you past seven then...at the gym? Which one?" Jean asked, walking backwards.

"Northwest corner, ground floor!" I called back as Jean disappeared through the archway.

* * *

Mid-winter gymnasium workouts for this group of athletes involved a lot of ten-pound medicine balls. I always took part in these sessions. Our drills were mostly hopping off padded mats and bounding over hurdles and boxes. It was a kind of joyful, muscular agony you usually engage in as part of a group. It's hard to imagine anyone doing this

alone. That would simply be self-flagellation. In my view, physical madness of this sort tends to be more of a team sport. Despite what we choose to think about "lone nuts" that run amok, it's really tribal life that makes most of us crazy.

Just after seven, we were completing our final set of cool downs and stretches that evening, when I spotted Jean Cousineau peeking into the gym. I introduced him quickly to Buck and a few of the guys just as we were leaving. We stopped into Poppa's Pizza on Spadina and ordered an extra-large Italian with anchovies to go. We sat on stools while we waited, watching the traffic and sidewalk passersby trudging their way through the slush. That gave me a chance to explain my involvement with track and field coaching. I told him some of what Andy Higgins and I had been discussing.

Before we got too stoned back at my place, I called Ms. Cynthia Kressler on her home phone. The call was cordial. In fact, to my relief, it was over inside of ten minutes. I apologized for my rudeness and made excuses for leaving early. She said she'd spoken with some of the students, who told her that Donna Reed and the others may have "overreacted." But that didn't let me off the hook. Kressler was stern about one or two things in particular—the outcome of which was my promise to discuss my lesson plans in advance from now on. It was an accommodation—meaning more to her and next to nothing to me so why not let her have it?

After the phone call to Ms. Kressler, Jean and I talked more about school and compromising experiences with practice teaching. After side one of the Plastic Ono Band, I put T-Rex's *Electric Warrior* on the turntable and rolled a couple more joints from the ounce I had left in a Jamaican cigar box. I had nothing on hand to drink except milk, water, and coffee. That seemed to surprise and disappoint Monsieur Cousineau.

As I picked my book up off the chest that I used for a table, Jean said, "Still reading *Helter Skelter*, I see. And taking notes. Preparing another letter for Ms. Van Houten?"

I didn't mind him flipping through pages of *Helter Skelter*, but I picked up my notebook and closed it. Jean put the book down and told me about sources he'd come across in *Rolling Stone* and other magazines I'd never heard of. One of the things we discussed was how we might have reacted, ourselves, if these crimes had happened to our friends or family. Jean said something about twisting and tearing Manson's balls off with a pair of sizzling hot pliers. This image seemed to amuse him.

Combining what facts we knew from things we'd read, Jean and I

reviewed the ghastly scene the LaBianca children first encountered—the day after news of the slaying of Hollywood actress Sharon Tate Polanski and four others.

* * *

August 9th, 1969. The LaBianca children, Frank and Susan, together with Susan's boyfriend, Joe Dorgan, were the first to discover the crime scene. They called the police to their parents' moneyed home at 3301 Waverly Drive, near the famous observatory in Griffith Park. Upon entering the house, what the LAPD officers saw in the living room caused them to call for immediate backup. There were splashes of blood on the walls and the floor.

In addition to the pillowcase wrapped over Mr. LaBianca's head, there was a cord attached to a heavy lamp knotted around his neck, and his hands were tied behind his back with leather thongs. There was an ivory-handled, twin-tined carving fork embedded in his stomach, and, on his abdomen near several deep stab wounds, the letters 'WAR' were engraved into his flesh. Worst of all, a small but sharp kitchen knife had been thrust into his throat and just left there.

A sergeant from the backup unit was the first to discover Rosemary LaBianca's body in the master bedroom—but only after the first responders had already taken her husband away in a body bag. Mrs. LaBianca was found lying face down on the bedroom floor in a pool of blood. Like her husband, she had a pillowcase wrapped over her head which was secured around her neck with a lamp cord.

Leno LaBianca had been the forty-four-year old president and chief stockholder of the State Wholesale Grocery Company, which operated Gateway Markets. Mr. LaBianca also had horse racing and property interests in California and Nevada, just like Sinatra and some of his friends from Chicago. He died as a result of twelve knife wounds and fourteen punctures made by the carving fork that was left protruding from his stomach. In the living room beside the front door there was writing—"Death To Pigs" and "RISE"—in the victim's blood. As well, on the refrigerator door, one of the intruders had misprinted the phrase, "HEALTER SKELTER."

Mrs. LaBianca, an attractive businesswoman who owned her own boutique, had been stabbed a total of forty-one times. Six of the punctures could have in and of themselves been fatal. Some of the wounds perforated her stomach and lung. She also had lacerations of the cervical spinal cord and spleen. The most murderous wound was to the posterior of the neck, just slightly left of the midline. This single

wound in itself was savage enough to be fatal. In addition, more than a dozen "superficial" cuts had been inflicted post-mortem.

The coroner established there were perhaps as many as sixteen superficial, evidently postmortem, lacerations to Mrs. LaBianca's lower back. These injuries, he said, were readily distinguishable from the others. The coroner's report also stated these wounds to the lower back did not show any significant hemorrhage into any of the surrounding tissues. What explains this? Judging from crime scene photography, the prosecution would have us believe Leslie Van Houten must have acted like some wild animal—whom they imagine stabbed Rosemary LaBianca dozens of times—even *after* the woman was dead.

But is that really what happened? Somehow, I doubted it. What was it Marshall McLuhan taught us about the peculiar characteristics of photography? For one thing, it abolishes time. To say "the camera cannot lie," said McLuhan "is merely to underline the multiple deceits that are now practiced in its name."

* * *

"So what *really* went on here and why?" I asked Jean if he knew. He admitted he didn't. "I wouldn't believe anything the DA said—not about who, why, or wherefore. Only the people who were there know for certain."

We kept talking until a quarter past one. Jean then called a cab to take him home to his flat near the corner of Bathurst and Bloor. He told me he lived on the same side of the block as Honest Ed's Department Store. I thought it safe to say we had a good time indulging our morbid fascination with the Manson murders and the brutal events surrounding Leslie Van Houten. Despite his definitive portrait, Jean and I agreed there had to be more to the story than Bugliosi unveiled or uncovered. Perhaps Leslie's retrial would clear up more of the mystery. What if Helter Skelter wasn't the true motive? And to what *degree* were the codefendants equally guilty of murder?

I stayed up another hour or so scribbling more notes. Though my body was aching and begging for sleep, I had a hard time shutting my mind off. Finally dozed off for a spell—only to be startled awake by nightmarish cityscape scenes of people on fire and being chased by armored marauders. After scratching that down in my notebook, I returned to the very same dream I'd already come out of. And after tossing and turning and trying for hours to stay asleep, I finally dozed off until dawn. When I stopped dreaming and opened my eyes, I did

not want to wake up.

4

CUPID INTRODUCES LESLIE TO MANSON

The next morning in Ms. Kressler's office, she wasn't as calm as the night before on the phone. She clasped her hands and seemed to smile in a way I mistook as friendly.

"Last night I had a call from Mrs. Reed, Donna's mother. I'd rather not have this go any further. So, to simplify matters, you must promise not to speak to Donna Reed if you see her. She won't be coming to English class until after you've gone from the school. Is this all understood?"

"Perfectly. Is that all there is to it?"

"For now." She paused. I turned around. Then she continued, "Oh, and one other thing. Please remember not to start class until you've taken the rolls. Report all absences to me or, if I'm not there, to the office. This is an important duty you have been lax about."

The way I looked at the situation, conceding these points was a small price to pay in the service of suing for peace on the poetry front. If that was all there was to it, I was all for it. Ms. Kressler said she would "prefer it" if I presented Al Purdy that day instead of more Leonard Cohen. Fine by me. It just so happened I had plenty of Purdy's *Sex and Death* poems ready on hand, but I didn't tell her. I'd abandoned all tact, as always, and simply said I would dig something up.

Then, just as I'd begun to leave, I turned around again and said,

“I’m sorry, Cynthia, I’ll take the rolls if you say so, but frankly I don’t see the point. Students are unprepared for the most part. That’s where we should start. Forcing ill-equipped kids to come and just sit there only inhibits those who are *prepared* to take part.”

“You aren’t making any sense, Peter. Are you high or something?”

Of course I was, but there was no way for her to be certain.

“Listen,” I said, “I truly *believe* in teaching poetry the same way it’s written…with passion…not the same lame routines repeated over and…”

“Peter, please! Leave your speeches for the classroom. Or wherever. We’re talking about taking attendance. Stay on track.”

“Fine,” I said, “it’s just that I hoped we might talk more about today’s classes besides taking the roll call.”

Cynthia held up her hand and said, “Let’s leave it at that, shall we?”

I disagreed but backed down, even though I considered absenteeism a fluent way of making a point about schooling.

After faking the roll as a concession to Kressler, who sat at the back of the class taking notes, I handed out mimeographed copies of Al Purdy’s “At the Quinte Hotel.” It was a slight gamble. But I thought, what the hell. My supervisor’s evaluation wasn’t likely to suffer much worse no matter what I did. Though I could have been wrong about that, but, if I was, it shouldn’t matter.

Even though Al Purdy wrote his poem in the first-person, when I asked for someone to read it aloud it was a girl, not a guy, who volunteered. Not surprising. Lucky for us, she was an actress and had the pluck to give the ‘Quinte Hotel’ a decent whirl. And, whoever she was, she put on a really good show. There may be reason for hope after all.

I asked the class, “What does the poet’s ‘lament of a sensitive man’ have to say about Canadian values, bar fights, and the meaning of Carling-O’Keefe in this woeful society?”

No one laughed. Nothing but baffled, uneasy quiet from everyone, not just my detractors. Even those who weighed in on my side remained silent. Wrong joke for this crowd, I thought.

During the debriefing with Ms. Kressler, she asked what I had been trying to prove.

I responded, “I’m asking students to prove things for themselves. For instance, I’m asking them how the art of poetry can help us enjoy or pull through the best and worst of times. Let them see, if they don’t already, how poetry can be a joyous, poignant occasion.”

No response.

I reconsidered and then added, “I enjoyed giving my performance even if no one else did.”

Actually, that last part was true. Ms. Kressler scored me “poor”—on a scale one-out-of-five—for such “peculiar ambitions.” It was the lowest mark I’d ever been given on any course or teaching evaluation. Serves me right since such nonsense as grading meant less than nothing to me or anyone else. Why all the hubbub?

Outside of school, track and regular pick-up games of hockey in Varsity Arena, I spent one or two nights a week with my off- and on-again girlfriend Gabrielle Adler. I also made time to hang out on a regular basis with Jean Cousineau. The worst I could say about him was that he could be a mean drunk sometimes—more often with women than with me or other men. So I had to call him on that. But, most of the time when we got together to talk, we were high on Benzedrine and marijuana. I’d always tended more towards recreational stimulants and psychedelics. Mostly, I smoked pot when I was reading or writing. Jean was more into cigarettes, booze, and downers.

When we weren’t speculating idly or sharing facts about the cult of Charles Manson, Jean and I talked a lot about music, novels, film, and philosophy. Jean was fond of quoting ideas he lifted from Ortega, Malraux, Hesse, Camus, and Aleister Crowley. Together we also spoke at length about the “Tate-LaBianca” killings—admittedly, a cold way of referring to such frightful events. But neither he nor I had any ties to the case at that moment. I withheld talking too much at first about Leslie. For one thing, I was unsure of myself and wanted more time to think about her on my own before I tried expressing it to friends or strangers.

Among the filmmakers whose work Jean and I admired was Roman Polanski. Jean and I had both seen *Repulsion* and *Macbeth,* but hadn’t been to see *Knife in the Water, Chinatown,* or *The Fearless Vampire Killers* yet. In that one I’m told the director plays Alfred, the professor’s assistant, with Sharon Tate in the role of the innkeeper’s daughter. But of all Polanski’s films up until then, the one we talked about most often was *Rosemary’s Baby*.

Some people think of the ending. But the sequence that got to me was where Mia Farrow, playing Rosemary, discovers her husband who is in cahoots with their elderly neighbors and has drugged her. That scene is both a frightfully sadistic yet satirical send-up of Devil worship and the social obsession with terror.

Then, there’s the scene in which Rosemary, still in a trance-like state, is pinned naked to the bed. Her husband, Guy, Satanic

ringleaders, Roman and Millie Castevet, and a grotesquely bare-naked clique of their brethren surround her. Some of the witches are chanting ritualistic hymns while others paint Rosemary's breasts and torso with occult symbols in blood. During these hallucinations, Polanski occasionally gives us Rosemary's point of view with his camera. For instance, her husband, Guy, changes into a beast with hairy arms, scaly hands, and claws at the ends of his fingers. Most frightening of all were his yellow eyes resembling the Devil's.

Being semi-consciously raped, Rosemary cries out, "This is no dream! This is really happening!"

Everyone's worst nightmare came true for an instant.

When I complained to Jean that I thought the director adopted a rather quaint detachment toward rape, he replied, "Everybody wants something wicked sometime. Just ask Roman Polanski."

I thought that was a clever but callous thing to say.

January 17th was the date of my twenty-sixth birthday. I spent a good part of the day shopping in and around Kensington Market with my girlfriend. I'd known Gabrielle for more than a year, since we first met in the school of physical and health education. She was on the swim team, and I had been, unashamedly, courting my way through a few of the women's varsity squads. We'd been seeing each other steadily the past three or four months since beginning teacher's college. Gabe was studying to be an elementary school teacher.

She had a beautiful, substantial swimmer's body—broad shoulders, dark hair, big brown almond-shaped eyes and a wonderfully soft pale complexion with freckles. I liked most things about her except that she wasn't well read, and she wasn't any more *emotionally available* to me than I was to her or any other woman. The fact is, I wasn't a very good boyfriend. Even sex between us was awkward and hesitant on both of our parts. Lately, we'd begged off spending too many consecutive nights together. No doubt we each had our reasons why, but we never discussed them. Whatever doubts or suspicions I withheld, I suspected Gabrielle might have still been seeing her old boyfriend. I didn't mind all that much, since I'd been carrying on the same way myself.

Gabrielle's best friend, Karen, as it turns out, already knew my friend Jean from French classes they'd taken together. Big world, small café. Just ask Roman Polanski. So it was on my birthday that we four gathered to celebrate at Jean's apartment on Bathurst Street. On the way there, the girls and I stopped for coffee, milk, butter, eggs and

Betty Crocker brownie mix.

Everything in Jean's refrigerator, except the bottles of beer, had to be thrown out when we got there. So we ordered Chinese take-out from the Palace Garden and carried back tubs of rice, stinky tofu, and things like baked octopus on top of our odd-looking pizzas. Jean also invited his friend and houseguest, Martin, to celebrate, and they went out to the liquor control board on Spadina Avenue to pick up four bottles of Henkel and one marvelous four-liter jug of red Portuguese wine.

Martin was an old friend of Jean's from McGill University, who was spending a few nights in town on his way back to Los Angeles. He said he was a freelance journalist for the "underground press," which I thought sounded cool. To make a living at that you had to be pretty good.

"Anything you've written I might have seen on the newsstands?" I asked.

"Not much in Canada. Only pamphlets I wrote when I was a kid in Montreal. I live in LA now. I did write something once that was picked up by *Georgia Straight* on a bounce. But mostly I write for offbeat sheets like *The Barb* and now a few things for the *LA Free Press*. Still learning the ropes, you know, makin' the rounds."

"Working on anything interesting at the moment?" Jean asked him.

"Right now, I'm delving into a story on museums of death in California."

That's when the girls left the room and returned to the kitchen.

Martin Bijaux was five years older and tougher looking than the rest of us. He looked to me like a thirty-something Maurice "Mom" Boucher without the brush cut. Heavy set. Long, straight, light brown hair to his shoulders. I wasn't too rapt until we got high and he started *seriously* talking. When he mentioned a friend of his who once interviewed Roman Polanski, I was impressed. That reference led me to ask him what he knew about the Manson Family and Leslie Van Houten. It turned out he knew quite a lot more than I had expected.

Talking to Martin kept me, if not the others, deeply enthralled for most of the evening. I remember the slow motion dances the girls teased us with, mimicking underwater dance moves they'd been taught in synchronized swimming. I wasn't tempted. Someone cut the lights. There were twenty-seven birthday candles (one for good luck) on a bakery cake and a blue-on-white maple leaf outline of a hockey player wearing number "26" in the icing. Everyone gave me a book as a present. Everyone except Jean, who was getting drunk and couldn't

find his. Gabrielle made me the gift of W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge*. Martin handed me two unwrapped copies of *Rolling Stone* magazine. One of them was at least six years old, and both were about Charlie Manson.

Martin flipped open one of the magazines to show me the page beginning "The Year of the Fork, Night of the Hunter." Interview journalists, David Felton and David Dalton, conducted this sit-down with Manson in prison. The other article, titled "**Manson**," was written by a Hollywood talent scout who went by the pseudonym Lance Fairweather. His real name, Martin explained, was Gregg Jakobson—a friend of The Beach Boys' drummer Dennis Wilson.

It was Jakobson who introduced Manson to music producer Terry Melcher. Melcher lived with actress Candice Bergen at 10050 Cielo Drive in Benedict Canyon. I already knew from reading *Helter Skelter* that, after the couple moved out, the next residents to occupy the estate were film director Roman Polanski and his pregnant wife Sharon.

Gabe and Karen said they were both getting bored having to hear any more about "the bloody Manson Family" from us. We were politely reminded it was a birthday *party* after all. I was feeling high, and with red wine things always got blurry. But I did recognize that several things were happening at once, and some of it I wasn't fully aware of. Maybe the girls getting bored was just part of it. Someone had taken Led Zeppelin's *Presence* off the turntable and replaced it with David Bowie's *Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*. Martin and I kept on talking and ignored all the ruckus. But things on the dance floor began heating up.

"Sex *will* be expected later," Gabe declared out of nowhere.

She had one arm bent on her hip and the other crooked with her head in her palm. She was looking at me, but her face could be seen in more ways than one. Drunken Cubism. I noticed that got Jean's attention. I thought I detected some drunken slurring in the way Gabrielle said it, so I suspected she might either be lying or else just showing off. She and Karen whispered to each other and giggled before drifting back to the kitchen to drink some more champagne and clear away leftovers. Soon enough, the girls were back to singing and dancing with a thoroughly sloshed Jean Cousineau to accompany them.

Nodding toward the *Rolling Stone* magazines he gave me, Martin explained, "Before I left Montreal, I dug those out of a box I had stashed at my brother's. Jean told me you were interested in Manson when we spoke on the phone. So I brought them with me knowing it

was your birthday."

"I appreciate that. It's a real treat, Martin. Thanks. I'll read them with interest."

At one point later on, Jean came groovin' and jiving back into the living room with each of the ladies in tow. They were waving joints around like children's sparklers. With his free hand, Jean handed me a hastily wrapped (with tin foil and tape) copy of *The Garbage People* by John Gilmore. Then he went drifting and spinning back toward the girls. This was fine with me since I wanted more time to talk to Martin alone.

"Come with me, brother. I have something to show you," Karen said, hooking both Jean and Gabe by their elbows and steering them back to the kitchen.

Something they were baking in there had begun to smell good. Turns out Martin contributed a vial or two of the honey oil he brought with him, and the girls added that to the brick of hash Karen had crumbled into the brownie mix.

"Those smell pretty good," I said, bringing Martin another tumbler of red wine.

He moaned insincerely, "Oh no, not more dessert. I had too much food and cake already. I don't think I can take it."

But, judging from the size of the man, it looked to me like he'd taken it plenty of times—without apprehension.

"Peter, you know how Van Houten met Manson, don't you?" Martin asked me. I said I knew very little about that part of the story —except I did know it was through Leslie's boyfriend.

"Beausoleil, the guy who killed Gary Hinman, introduced them," I said.

"That's right. It was Bobby Beausoleil who brought her to Manson. A real ladies' man, from what I understand. Did you know that when Leslie met him in San Francisco, the first thing she told Bobby was that she would love him forever? She thought he was the most beautiful man in the world. It's all in the book Jean just gave you. No matter that the prick worshiped himself as the Devil. Same as Manson. She goes in for the strangest dudes, doesn't she?

"Did you know," Martin added, "Bobby told a reporter I know that the first time he had sex with Leslie they were both tripping on acid."

"The heart has its reasons," I said.

"Know what else? The dude liked to dress up. Something weird about that one."

"Sex as theater perhaps?" I was guessing, torn between horselaughs and grimacing yuckiness.

Martin said, “Yeah, well, to each his own. Both Beausoleil and Manson had a thing for kinky getups and sex fantasies about them in common. They were both into drugs, music, and girls.”

Who wasn’t, I thought, so I shrugged and let Martin continue.

“They thought they were gonna become big rock stars and be like the next Lennon and McCartney. Too much acid. But Beausoleil always had girls because of his looks. Charlie had lucky charms. As a pimp, Charlie saw he could use a guy like Bobby to lure more girls to his cult. The girls in turn would lure more men, and Manson needed the men for protection.”

“Drugs, music, girls, and *violence*,” I amended. “What were all the guns, knives, bikers and swords at Spahn all about anyway?”

Martin said, “You know Manson’s a paranoid racist...”

“Is that all?”

“Among other things, yeah. He was afraid of the Black Panthers, especially after he and Tex Watson stole two grand from a drug dealer named Bernard Crowe. Manson was worried Crowe would bring some of his gang to even the score. Charlie ended the threats by shooting Crowe in the stomach. He thought he killed him. Only he didn’t. But Crowe never reported the shooting to police. That was just a week or so before Tate.”

“Yes,” I said, “I remember reading about that in *Helter Skelter*.”

“Yeah, well, there’s more…”

The whole time Martin and I were having this conversation, the two-on-one play in the kitchen was getting louder and wilder. And why not? It was a party, after all, and everyone did their own thing for the most part.

The party ended neither with a whimper nor with a bang, as it turned out. I shoveled Gabrielle out of the taxi and into bed at my place, where she quickly passed out. So much for the “Let there be sex!” declaration. Just as well. That too was becoming a puzzle without all the pieces. So that’s how I began my twenty-seventh orbit of Helios. The same as the first one, more or less, sleepless and naked —the same way I’ll probably go out.

5

LESLIE IN THE SKY WITH DIAMONDS

Friday, February 11th, 1977. The competitive indoor track and field season had begun. I knew Olympic Coach Fred Foot by reputation long before I worked with him at the University of Toronto Track Club. I was also Professor Bruce Kidd's graduate assistant at the school of physical and health education. That's how I first met Andy Higgins, in fact. And it was upon their faith and friendship that my future at the University of Toronto, if I had any, would unfold. So I naively assumed that since Foot had inspired the likes of Kidd and Higgins, he would have the same effect on me. No such luck.

Fred Foot was a *bona fide* legend in Canadian track and field. Since the 1950s, he successfully coached a steady stream of athletes to the Olympic Games and all other major trials in which Canadians are eligible to compete. For example, with such famous runners as Bill Crothers and Bruce Kidd, Fred Foot inspired generations of other athletes and coaches to follow. He gave our country's best the belief they could compete with the rest of the world, and, reliably, his beliefs were proven right. Which made things worse for me though.

Under Foot's tutelage, long-distance runner Bruce Kidd won eleven Canadian Championships during his career. He also won five US National titles and one in the United Kingdom in distances from a mile to a marathon. Bruce was only twenty-one years old when he competed at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Both Kidd and Foot had been instrumental in getting the *Toronto Star* involved in sponsoring the annual Star-Maple Leaf Gardens indoor track meet, and tonight was the night.

This had always been a premier athletics event, with several

internationally ranked athletes competing each year. The year before, in fact, my friend Bruce Simpson won the pole vault with a clearance of 5.38 meters (more than seventeen and a half feet) and was ranked among the top five in the world in his sport. So, once again, we looked forward to a memorable evening. I invited Gabrielle, Karen and Jean to come along and found them the best seats close to the action.

One of Foot's athletes decided to pass on her sixty-meter heat so she could stay fresh for the two hundred later. But this was late in the day for such changes. It now meant she'd have to run the heat anyway to not be disqualified later. I told her to pull up right after the gun and she did, although she made it look terribly obvious. Someone complained to the officials. I was willing to withstand a verbal rap on the knuckles for the mix-up, if only Coach Foot had left it at that.

Fred chewed me out in front of a crowd of athletes, spectators, officials, coaches and snack vendors too—anyone within general earshot, including my friends in the stands. I could feel my face blushing and burning. Finally, the esteemed coach stormed away in one direction, and I just as quickly launched myself with the opposite bearing. I'd been publicly humiliated. I was angry and scared.

Later that night, after the meet, Gabrielle, Karen, Jean and I shared a pitcher of draft and a basket of wings somewhere on Yonge Street. Neither Gabe nor I was much in the mood for clumsy lovemaking afterward, so I kissed her goodnight at the subway at Wellesley Street and walked the rest of the way home through Queen's Park alone. Jean and Karen went their way as well.

As a matter of course, when I got home, the first thing I did was check for mail in the front hall. On top of the rad there was a letter posted to me with a US postage stamp. The return address stamped in the corner read:

NAME: L. VAN HOUTEN
BOOKING NO. 4186-613 BKS. NO. 5001
P.O. BOX 54320 TERMINAL ANNEX
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90054

Twice on the back with the utmost surety was stamped: **INSPECTED LOS ANGELES COUNTY JAIL.** How reassuring that was, I thought. I just sort of weighed it in my hand at first. It was lighter and thinner than the letter I'd sent her six weeks before. What the heck. I couldn't wait any longer and tore the envelope open without daring to imagine what she had to say.

The letter was written in pencil on two pages of yellow legal-sized

paper. Leslie thanked me for taking the time to write a long letter. She mentioned that her lawyer, Maxwell Keith, had passed it along as soon as he got it. She wrote a few things about her transfer from the California Institution for Women in Frontera to the Sybil Brand County Jail in Los Angeles. She'd spent time there before, when on trial in 1970-71.

"Not much has changed," she said.

Sybil Brand was a short distance from her mother Jane's house, somewhere I'd never heard of, called Monterey Park. Her mom was a teacher. Bonus, I thought. Her brother David and sister Betsy lived in and around LA as well and could now visit her more often than before. Her brother Paul Jr. lived with his wife in San Francisco, and her dad was working up north somewhere in Washington State. Pretty tame stuff for the most part. But still, it was a start.

I played both sides of Leonard Cohen's *New Skin for the Old Ceremony*, got high and reread Leslie's letter a couple of times. Then, I started to write a response. I stayed up late and woke up early. There was a minefield of scattered, crumpled paper on my desk and all over the floor. Each time I'd finished a page of rough notes and read what I had, I tore them up and started over.

It was Saturday morning, and I had nowhere special to be. So, naturally, I went for a run. Since my competitive sprinting days were over, I ran more for my mind than my body. The physical attributes were now more of a side-effect.

The weather was crisp and clear, and the sun shone through halos and curls of high whirling clouds. I headed west along Davenport Road, up the Baldwin Steps and right on through Spadina Park past Casa Loma. Last evening's skirmish with Fred Foot needed to sweat itself out.

Gabrielle called at around quarter past eight and asked if she could come over. She pledged to bring a dozen hot chewy Montreal bagels and a tub of fresh cream cheese. She asked what I was up to, so I told her exactly.

"I'm reading all about Leslie Van Houten and writing a letter in support of her getting out of prison."

Gabrielle said she wondered where I found the time.

"What is so damned important about Leslie Van Houten? Don't you have other things to worry about, like grad school for starters? Or have you no time for that or me either?"

"First of all, there's plenty that's 'damned important' about Leslie Van Houten," I said calmly. "This is no mere distraction. These are cultural studies, among other things, the way I see it. As to your point

about grad school…"

And so I went on for nearly an hour and never let Gabe get a word in edgewise.

"I think you need to play the game more and not be so radical," she said at last. "That is, if you want to get a job and keep it. Do you plan to continue with coaching?"

I shook my head.

Gabrielle said, "You never say so. I never know what's really going on with you. Are you still angry about last night at the Gardens?"

She asked me before I was ready to answer. Nothing more was said by either one of us for a minute or two. Gabe helped herself to another hot press of coffee. She wasn't smiling.

Finally, I made the announcement.

"I've decided not to go on with teaching high school as a professional route. That much is sure. I'm still waiting to hear back from the higher education group at OISE about getting into the MA program this summer. If they say 'No,' I'll decide something else later. Professor Sheffield sent me a very nice letter, requesting my referees forward their letters directly to his office. I've asked Higgins and Kidd for their recommendations. What do you think of the plan?"

"You'll get in. Peter, I know you will."

Then, her face turned the somber color of autumn. Her dark eyes were suddenly wide with affection when she added, "You'll be moving on soon, one way or another."

Ten seconds of silence elapsed.

Sounding sheepish, I repeated, "One way or another. I'll never suit where I am. Let's face it. If I get into OISE, maybe—just maybe—there's a chance. I'll start with summer school as a trial and see if things work out after that."

Gabe didn't say anything more right away and neither did I. After a minute or two, she turned my face towards hers with her hand under my chin.

She said, "I know you won't like my saying so, but isn't your interest in Leslie Van Houten just an infatuation with somebody famous?"

"Is that what you think?" I said, looking her straight in the eyes.

"Maybe." She looked away. "You admit you're distracted, unfocused, uninspired...therefore unhappy. I can see you haven't been paying attention. Karen thinks so too."

To myself I kept it hidden how right I thought she was and why.

"Is that right? Attention to what, exactly? You guys seem to think I'm looking to be somebody's some kind of hero? If it were true, that

would be nice, but that's not the point."

I stood up and brushed the crumbs from my lap onto the carpet. Gabe swept them up while I watched without protest.

"If that's not the point, what is? And what do your friends Buck or Jean have to say? Have you discussed this with Andy?" Gabrielle asked. But I couldn't answer.

What I thought was too muddled and would've taken too long to make any sense to either myself or others.

Before stepping out the door she kissed me twice on the lips and once on the forehead. That finishing touch felt like the uncertain beginning of one thing and the end of another. Once Gabe was gone, I went back to reading and started writing another letter. I played Neil Young's *Zuma* once more, getting high on the mood of his music. As I wrote, I sprinkled in lyrics of his with words of my own that matched the syllabic verse of his songs. Gabrielle's visit was pushed aside in my mind and soon forgotten. All my thoughts went out to the tall pretty girl imprisoned somewhere on the dark side—east of Eden—in sunny California.

Since Leslie hadn't said much about her upcoming trial in her letter, that was something I was sure to ask her about. And, since she'd been polite enough to ask about my family and where I was from, I was anxious to answer her questions. I told her about growing up summers on a family farm thirty miles north of the city and about spending the school year living near Carlton and Yonge in the heart of downtown Toronto. She asked me what my high school was like, and I tried to explain how I didn't know since I never went there. I was expelled after my first year at a private Catholic boys' school. And, after transferring to public school and failing grade ten twice, I told her the principal at Victoria Park Collegiate, Jackson Tovell, (who knew me from football, hockey, and track) said he'd had a look at my grades and was puzzled. I had to sit for the Dominion of Canada IQ exam in his office. He said he needed to know whether or not I was "truly a moron."

When I was sixteen, I left home to live with Jackson Tovell and his family. We lived in a nice suburban house near Windfields Park in York Mills. It was a big break for me—a real turning point in my life—that happened right after an exceptionally hardhearted beating I took from my father. To be fair, my dad, Frank, never drank or ever once spanked my butt that I can remember. He went straight from the flat-out palm-slap upside the head to full-fisted sucker punches when I wasn't looking. Other people remember him as a handsome, devoted son, and peppy raconteur. Yeah, I saw that tap dance he did for others

—especially strangers. But what I recall best of all was my broken nose and thirteen stitches over both of my eyes.

The law in Ontario secondary schools granted principals the authority to complete official transcripts any way they decided. Instead of attending the rest of high school, Jack arranged for me to audit whatever classes I wanted to take at the University of Toronto—provided I had the consent of each professor. I was never turned down. There were no tests or exams I had to take unless I wanted. I voluntarily wrote essays, for which I received feedback. The best gift of all about having the *freedom to learn* was taking the reins out of the hands of the *pezzonovante*, who were forever trying to put the bit between my teeth. Jack taught me the meaning of *curriculum*. It means the racecourse for charioteers and their fastest, most powerful chargers.

Most importantly, I said in my letter to Leslie that, *instead of schooling*, I'd learned to take responsibility for directing my own education and not leave that to others. Since I never had to worry about attendance or meaningless hoops to jump through, I became a socialization that didn't take, which is a badge of honor I've been paying the price for, without regret, ever since. Some battles are worth the fight, even when lost. It toughens you up for the next one.

In 1968, Jack called an old friend at the Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. They sent varsity hockey coach Tiff Cook to Toronto to recruit me. After watching me play and inviting me to visit the campus, I joined the Bobcats about the same time as Leslie joined Manson. I stayed for two years before transferring home to the University of Toronto. Ohio U had no graduate school of philosophy.

Each question Leslie asked about me, I put back to her. For example, I asked about her wanting to become a professional writer once she was out of prison. And I told her how, philosophically speaking, I believed teachers of writing could never gain any real sense of an individual's personal worth and unique value for creative expression, as long as they continued to dictate to others what they must learn for themselves. I borrowed the phrase *instead of education* from John Holt—hoping it wouldn't sound too grand to ask her, "Why must everything be 'learned' before students are permitted to do it?" I told her that compulsory schooling was a destructive invention and that, in my view, I was headed in another direction as a philosopher—somewhere new I could call my own.

Once I'd finished trying to impress her, I inserted the recent photograph of myself that she asked for inside the pages of my letter. It was a black and white picture Gabrielle had taken of me. I asked

Leslie if she could send me one of herself as well. I dropped the envelope in the post box outside the drug store near Rochdale College. There was something else I thought to do on a whim. I went into the store and purchased two Valentine cards. One was for giving to Gabrielle with chocolates and flowers. In the other, I hastily scribbled belated best wishes and signed it, "*Amor Fati*, from Peter with kisses." I posted the card same as the letter to: Leslie Van Houten, Booking No. 4186-613, P.O. Box 54320, Terminal Annex, Los Angeles, California.

On the Sunday before Valentine's Day, Gabrielle had come up with a cool idea for our taking part in a family tradition. Instead of lining up with other shameless, dutiful couples in restaurants, we observed the Feast of San Valentino at Gabrielle's house with her entire family. We shared dinner at home and then watched a video together on the latest invention: a Sony Betamax. *Dr. Strangelove*, how romantic. Still, I thought this all very special and charming.

When I arrived back home at my flat, it took me less than an hour to plan for school the next day. With time to spare, I spent the rest of the night getting high and reading more about how Leslie met Bobby Beausoleil. The history of boyfriends, I decided, might be one way of figuring out what led to Leslie joining the Manson cult in the first place. Maybe Gabe had been right to call it an "infatuation." I've heard it called worse. None of that mattered. I wasn't just curious to find out about how Leslie's entanglements with the Manson cult ever got started, but also how she dragged herself out of that abyss. But it was too soon, and I didn't dare ask her. I waited and wondered if I'd ever hear back from her in a second letter. In the meantime, I kept reading *The Garbage People*.

* * *

Leslie Van Houten was twice voted "homecoming princess" of Monrovia High School in California. Her parents divorced when she was just fourteen. Soon after all that, she and her first serious boyfriend started experimenting with sex and drugs. (Sounds good to me. Who hasn't?) For a while it became a habit of theirs to skip school, get naked, and drop lots of acid. *Leslie in the Sky with Diamonds*. In the sixties, unguarded teen lust and subsequent pregnancies were not uncommon—neither was legal abortion. Leslie wanted to have the baby, but her mother insisted against it.

After her parents split up, Leslie ran away toward San Francisco.

Like so many of us kids at the time, she was headed that way with flowers in her hair and songs in her heart. And, somewhere near Mendocino, she joined a camp of other young hippies who were into mysticism, yoga and psychonautic adventures. Those were the times. And that's where she met the handsome drifter Bobby Beausoleil, who went by the nickname "Cupid."

When Leslie told Bobby she'd go with him anywhere, he asked her, would she go as far as Hell. He claims she answered, "Take me." And, as it turns out, that's where they were headed. Right away, Leslie discovered she was expected to share Cupid with a gaggle of other girls and be part of his entourage—kind of crowded at bedtime. Bobby traded the old school bus in for a beat-up truck that he and his band of gypsies used as a camper. It wasn't long before Leslie tired of all the cramped quarters and infighting among the girls over Bobby's divided affections. So she ran off with Cupid and another girl back to LA. He said he had friends with solid contacts in the music business. Here comes the next Elvis.

After drifting between public rest areas and parking overnight in a series of vacant lots, the group eventually settled at the Manson Family encampment at Spahn Ranch near Chatsworth. This rent-a-tired-pony estate was actually the site of an old Western movie set owned by a near-blind cowboy named George Spahn. There were still a few hired hands around to look after the horses. And, in exchange for having a few of the girls to look after him, Mr. Spahn let Charlie's Family bunk in tatty old trailers and derelict buildings scattered about the property.

When Manson first met the pretty brunette Beausoleil brought with him this time, he dropped what he was doing to study her closely. Charlie had plenty of experience handling runaway teenaged girls like Leslie before. First, he tacitly implied he possessed insight into all of her lonely disaffections. For example, he used a common theatrical device to mirror her moods. By copying each changing expression or gesture Leslie made, Manson intended to show how well he could identify what she was thinking and feeling. That's why they call guys like him "con *artists*." Leslie's childhood clan was soon forgotten, once she'd found this new family home. She may have been lost, but she wasn't alone. There were plenty of kids on drugs looking for a way out of the juggernaut. Nothing new seemed unappealing.

Danny DeCarlo, a member of the Straight Satans motorcycle club who was camped out at the ranch at the time, shared a dusty old bunkhouse with Bobby and his harem. DeCarlo said how right away he could tell Leslie was more independent and smarter than the other

girls. She was open to Manson but still a bit skeptical, at first. But, after Leslie split up with Bobby Beausoleil, she went back to the Manson family at Spahn Ranch. Charlie took it upon himself, Danny said, to "set her straight" and damn quick at that. The words Danny used to describe this process were, "She was going to fit in like she was being *locked down*."

I had to wonder what on earth all of that meant and how it was done.

Since Leslie was very attractive, Charlie saw he could use her to get the men he wanted to join his cult. Other witnesses corroborated the effect Manson had on each of his followers. Most agreed he was like "some kind of hypnotist" who savored the role. During the first trial, Prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi confirmed these facts, whenever it suited him, but vehemently objected to the same points when reiterated by the defense team in their counter-arguments.

Former Manson Family members such as Leslie Van Houten were nothing more than Charlie Manson's "pawns," Bugliosi reported.

Later on in his book, he wrote: "Somewhere along the line, I wasn't sure *how* or *where* or *when*—Manson developed a control over his followers so all-encompassing that he could ask them to violate the ultimate taboo—say, 'Kill,' and they would do it."

And some of them did, Mr. B.—some more profusely than others. Why was this man so intent on reducing them all to pawns of Charlie Manson with no will of their own and then equally intent on reconstructing them as mindful, capable individuals acting out of their own volition? Bugliosi seemed as nuts as the rest of them.

* * *

A change is as good as a rest, so they say. I was still spending time each week sprinting, skating and lifting. And reading about Leslie was one way I had of putting my feet up. The more time I spent reading about the Manson case meant spending less time with friends such as Gabrielle Adler and Jean Cousineau. Besides, both Gabe and Jean were as busy with school and other things as I was.

It was a cold Tuesday night, the 1st of March. I had been reading more about Leslie's long past affairs with boyfriends like Beausoleil, Manson, Watson and others. I was tired of looking for clues to the attraction. I have to admit that, at one point, I was feeling put off by so many citations to Leslie's devotion to these sorts of creeps. I certainly had nothing in common with any of these jokers, except one tiny bit with Tex Watson, who played football and sprinted in high

school. But I also realized that guilt by association is nothing but prejudice. Some feeble excuse for getting my competitive blood up. One simple fact is that Leslie had been terribly young and out of her mind at the time all this madness happened. I knew there was more to the mystery than that, and the way I had to find out the truth was to go on exchanging letters. I decided to put a lot of myself into that.

It was well after ten when I called it a night. Then the telephone rang sounding louder than usual. On the other end a substantively drunk Jean Cousineau was calling from a pay phone inside of Frank Vetere's Pizzeria. I think he said that he and Gabrielle would like to come over to talk.

6

WAITING FOR THE SIREN'S CALL

As someone bound to lecturing others way more than I should, I welcomed Jean and Gabe over. Naturally, I was curious, even if it was obvious what this was about. I was anxious to hear what they had to say. I brushed my teeth, swallowed three extra-strength aspirin and put the water on to boil. I lit a scented candle, burned a doob for myself right away and rolled a couple more for later on.

I took a quick inventory to assess how I was feeling and recorded this in my diary. For one thing, my whole body ached in a nice way, only my neck was stiff from reading in bed. It snapped, crackled and popped when I turned it. My face and the back of my neck began to feel flushed and damp when I stretched. The century-old radiator felt too hot, and the air in my apartment stood stale and looked rather murky. A cold, timorous wind was starting to blow outside in the dark, though I felt compelled to open the windows.

The first thought I had when I opened the door was that Jean was too drunk to talk. He quickly confirmed I was right.

"Where's Gabrielle?" I asked, and Jean said something that sounded like, "She chickened out," or whatever the French is for that.

"How...rar yu?" he asked.

Once he stepped inside, Jean rushed past me and straight to the john where he threw up in loud heaves and splashes. Poor *salaud*. You can only laugh if you've been there yourself. I put a fresh roll of paper towels beside the door to the bathroom and left him in private. When he dragged himself out ten minutes later, Jean asked for a glass of

water. I had one ready with ice cubes and handed it to him after he staggered to the futon and fell down.

"Have you aspirin? Or anythin' stronger?"

Yes, I did, and I told him where to find it. I heard him clanking and banging around in the kitchen, so I obliged him by getting them down from the shelf. I handed Jean four or five tablets out of a bottle, and I said to take only one at a time.

"You should keep a couple on hand for when you need them," I said.

"What are they?"

"Sixty milligrams of codeine sulfate. What's left in that bottle is leftover from my last surgery. One is a good dose to take this side of a hangover. More than that would be negligent. Be sure to drink plenty of water." Then I poured him a second glassful.

"*Rx* in peace," I added.

Jean slept under the sleeping bag I threw over top of him. In the morning I could see he was awake when I came back from my run. He'd made himself coffee in the French press so I asked if he would he like another cup. It took us a while to get around to talking about Gabrielle.

Jean explained Gabe was more confused than upset, "Which is why she'd rather not talk 'til she's ready. So I decided I'd come alone."

"Hey man, listen," I said, "I'm cool with that. Tell Gabe to call anytime, or I'll wait and see her at school. You let me know. I'm happy you two are dating. This way, we can still all be friends. It's so…modern."

I'm no surer of the reasons why I held this attitude either then or now. Was it simply more liberal ties or something more complex and intra-personal? Up until then, I hadn't been overly possessive or jealous of girlfriends, but all of that changed after Leslie.

Neither of us said much more about Gabe after that. Jean listened to the radio while I took a shower. When I came out, what we spoke about most was Jean's hope of finding a job teaching French lit and my chances of getting into OISE that summer. And we spoke about women in general, of course—no one else in particular. All the unknowns…

"What are the odds you will go on coaching?" Jean asked.

"None, really," I said. "At my level, it's more like volunteer service than the career I was meant for."

We drank more coffee, got high and, after a while, Jean asked if he could play a side or two on the stereo.

"This one okay?" he asked, holding up a disc by T-Rex.

“Ah, yes,” I said, when I saw which tracks he had chosen. When it came time for the chorus I tried hitting the notes, but was off-key by miles.

“Something we *both* can relate to,” I said, with reference to both our new loves. “True blue through and through!”

And we clanked coffee mugs.

Soon after that, he left, and I hardly thought twice about what had happened with Gabe. I simply went back to what I’d been reading about my “sullen Garbo siren” and awaiting the siren’s call.

Jean called a couple of days later, on Friday, March 4th.

“Thanks again for the tablets.”

I knew he’d like those blue ones. He’d talked to Gabrielle, and she said everything was “hunky dory” when it came to her and me. Sounded worn but was welcome news all the same, since it came without recriminations.

Jean told me Gabe and Karen were going up north for the weekend —something to do with Karen’s family in Huntsville. Jean said he was free and asked if I wanted to hang out. He mentioned there might be something cooking downtown that night. Guy Bijaux, Martin’s younger brother, was in TO for a few days before having to head back to Montreal.

“He’s staying at the Park Plaza and would like to meet you,” Jean said. “He’s offered to treat us to a night on the town. Promised surprises. What do you say? Don’t come dressed in a sweat suit.”

“There’s a big track meet tomorrow, Jean,” I said. “I was planning to be in bed early.”

Silence at both ends.

Then, on impulse, I blurted out, “Sure, okay, what the heck. Why not? I can be late to the Gardens since I’m just a bystander anyway. What time do you want to go out?”

“Guy said to come by about nine. He has business ’til then. I can meet you before that, and we can head over together.”

I agreed with the plan.

In the meantime, another letter arrived from Leslie. That was always a thrill and a treat. She was sure to get me daydreaming, smiling and feeling sure of myself. Although, one thing she said got me thinking about how wrong I had been in making certain assumptions. For instance, I presumed she’d been a politically disaffected, middle-class teenage hippie just like me with an impossible home life. Not so. Leslie told me the reason she left home

wasn't because of any intense alienation. The real reason she went on the road was due to a healthy curiosity about spirituality and communal living, and to be with a boy she'd fallen madly in love with. What were the odds of that working out? I had to wonder. One of the worst things for her, Leslie said, was the pain that she caused her family. They thought what happened to her had been their fault somehow, and that wasn't the case at all.

The temperature outside that morning was just above freezing. There was a light wind and rain in the weather. I treated myself to another long, slow-distance jog in the grey swollen fog. I ran for miles east along Davenport Road and turned south at Church Street. I walked slowly past the corner of my grandparents' old block. Distant memories of great smelling food, loud angry quarrels, shattered glass and images of crying women came to mind—like all kinds of debris after an upriver storm.

I picked up the pace running past Maple Leaf Gardens but slowed again before turning into a headwind pushing for home. I imagined myself talking to Leslie. I wanted to tell her about where in our previous lives I thought she and I might still be hurting. Cooling down, I ducked inside Hart House to finish my workout. I did a set of four or five one-hundred meter accelerations on the track. Then, I stretched and lifted a bit after that, eventually settling into the hot tub before a cold shower. It felt cozy to change into the fresh cotton sweats and clean socks that I kept in my locker.

Andy Higgins was nowhere I could find him. Was this even a good time to talk? I did run into Jim Buchanan coming out of the northwest corner of Hart House though. He told me he'd skipped lunch with Higgins also. We talked a little about the Ontario Universities Championship track meet tomorrow.

"Where're you headed next?" Buck asked.

I pointed north.

He said, "I'm meeting someone at the Colonnade. Want to walk that way together?"

I guessed he assumed I was on my way home. Actually, I wasn't. But it always felt good to spend some time with Buck. He was a near-endlessly upbeat and positive person.

It wasn't long before I baited him into asking "How's the Van Houten trial going? Still getting letters?" I gave him a proud, affirmative nod.

"Her trial starts the end of the month," I said. "Got another letter today, in fact."

"I guessed as much from the way you are smiling. You think she

stands a chance of ever getting out?"

I'd heard that question so often I took my time to come up with a novel evasion but couldn't find one.

Finally, I said, "Look, the first trial was a farce. I think I told you already. Manson had the girls put it on like a circus for Bugliosi and company, especially the reporters."

"I still don't get it, Peter. You say she didn't actually *kill* anyone. But she was there, right? She got into the car knowing there were going out to kill some people."

"Right. But how did she decide? What was her motive? I'm still finding these things out myself. All I know is that she was there to do whatever Charlie and Tex *told* her to. As weird as this sounds—I think she'd been *conditioned* just like any captive soldier. Who knows what goes on in anyone's mind, especially a woman's? Whatever her part, I'm sure she did what she did out of allegiance and madness, not malice. At least, that's my opinion."

"You can't really believe that gets her off," Buck said.

It wasn't a question. I sighed when I heard it put as abruptly as that.

"Who can predict? All I know is that the Manson girls never dared flout the men. And Tex Watson admits he was the one who killed both Mr. and Mrs. LaBianca. *And* the five others the night before...as he would have done whether Leslie was there or not. Her job was to take orders. No one could have stopped or started that horrible, cowardly mess but Manson. Even the chief prosecutor admitted as much in the trial. Only Charlie Manson had a motive for committing these terrible crimes. He had *complete* control over the others."

"And you think that's enough to excuse what she did?"

"What *did* she do? Do you know? I think it's possible she's paid her time for what she's done. And time is everything. When is enough, enough?"

Buck reached out to me with one hand and turned me toward him with a tug on my shoulder.

"Aren't you just seeing her the way you want to see her instead of the way things really are?"

That was a poignant remark. We traded back and forth glances from each other's faces to our feet.

"What's wrong with that? Who's to say? Instead of what?" Feeling defensive, I practically shouted. Buck's jaw fell an inch because I said it so brusquely.

"Look," I gently added, "If she pled guilty to manslaughter the sentence for that is *usually* less than the time she's served already. I

want to see her get a fair chance to prove herself."

"Yeah, but isn't this case kinda special, Peter? You *know* what I mean. What about the victims' families? Killing like that hurts a lot of people. What about justice for them?"

"Is vengeance the same thing as justice?"

Here, we both paused and stopped fast in our tracks. A taxi driver driving past slowed down thinking we might be flagging a ride.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I just don't get it. I know you're sincere, but I can't understand how you can say she isn't guilty?"

"I didn't say that. But guilty of what and to what degree?"

We went inside the Colonnade on the south side of Bloor Street and sat down at a table on the center mezzanine. Buck was taking an interest in what I was saying, so I owed him as thoughtful an answer as to why, after serving eight years for what she'd done, I thought Leslie Van Houten deserved to be let out of prison.

I explained that the basis of Leslie's appeal was because her attorney, Ronald Hughes, mysteriously disappeared during the first trial in 1970. Hughes had told friends he was *convinced* he would win an acquittal for his pretty young client. But he never had the chance to make his case. Maxwell Keith served as Hughes' replacement and stuck with Leslie all through her self-restoration. In 1976, Keith argued in court that because he hadn't been given adequate time to prepare a proper defense, her first trial should have been severed from Manson's. The appeals court agreed and overturned her conviction.

Since the trial judge didn't order a separate trial when he should have, Leslie was given a clean slate to start with. She would stand trial again on the same charges: first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder. Only now, for the first time in nearly a decade, she was about to show the world what the real Leslie Van Houten was about. She wasn't just another "Manson girl" any longer. She had become her own woman at last and a beautiful one at that.

I told Buck, "As of this moment, she has not been proven guilty of anything. She's been *charged* with first-degree murder. Personally, I don't think that's a proper indictment."

"Based on what?" Buck asked.

So far I had been stumped for an answer.

I said. "Look, Jim, Les's lawyer will contend she'd been suffering from 'diminished mental capacity.' Because of the *hex* she was under. In her delusional state, she believed Charlie Manson was the incarnation of Christ. Therefore, her participation in that cruel disaster might warrant a lesser charge. That's all I'm saying—but it should not be first-degree murder."

"Err…what's the difference?"

In criminal law, as poorly as I understood it, "diminished responsibility" is a defense by which the accused doesn't dispute breaking the law but offers proof they were injured at the time of the crime. Thus, if Leslie was incapable of "premeditating with malice aforethought," she shouldn't be held criminally liable. Leslie's psychic dysfunctions—leading up to the crime, during, and after—were mitigating factors in her defense.

I told Buck, "Her ability to use her own judgment was impaired through a program of sex, drugs and brainwashed devotion to Manson."

Right as I was saying this, Buck's rendezvous came to the top of the escalator and walked towards where we were sitting out in front of the Mauk Sandwich Shop. Buck stood up right away to greet her. That ended our talk. Buck and I split-up soon after his attractive, but fragile-looking, girlfriend arrived. I've forgotten her name, but I remember that the way she looked reminded me a lot of my friend, Tricia Woodbridge—the nurse I'd spent time with in Los Angeles.

* * *

Instead of turning for home after that, I backtracked to the library as previously planned. There was a recent edition of the *Los Angeles Times* (as recent as February 17th) that I copied and read in the periodicals' room. That kept up my heart rate. In it was a report by staff writer Bill Farr about Leslie. She told him she was still haunted by nightmares for her role in the killing of Mr. and Mrs. LaBianca.

"I know that I did something horrible," she said, "… I don't expect people to forgive me but I hope eventually they will give me a chance."

She went on to say she looked forward to telling the truth about what really happened.

For instance, at the first trial Leslie could only say what *Manson* wanted her to. Same as he orchestrated the exact scripts of the others. The real reason Manson had Gary Hinman killed was because he threatened to go to the cops. After all, Charlie was torturing him for his money. (I made a note to look into that closely.) Manson's paranoid whims about "Helter Skelter" also were, to an extent, just another conjurer's trick to get others to carry out this dirty work for him. Just like he used sex, isolation and the constant threat of violence to get what he wanted.

Manson used sex to gain power over the others. That is no secret.

The scores of acid trips Leslie took with Manson were his deliberate treatment exercises for total mind control, which must have amused him. Besides, it was vital for erasing an individual's previous conditioning and replacing it with the contagious mantras he compelled his followers to repeat. ("I would die for you. Would you die for me?") And no one could play any music but Manson's, The Beatles or The Moody Blues. Everyone had to be of one mind, and that mind belonged to Charlie.

Given the profound isolation at Spahn, no one knew about, nor could debate, things such as student anti-war protests or the crisis in black and white America. Even the sex treatment was playacting and taking on various roles—just like Charlie's customary reenactment of Christ's crucifixion—only less serious. On the surface, the orgies were just innocent fun, but, underneath, Manson used it like magic to make time and ego disappear. If you've ever done MDA or LSD in a group, you can imagine how readily someone like Manson could replace the sense of self a person normally has. With the drug-induced sureness of *oneness* that comes with that experience, the victim comes to associate with the persona of one Charles M. Manson.

Timing is everything. When Charlie was released from prison in 1967, he must have thought he'd died and gone to heaven. The times were just ripe for his con. He'd learned how to size up these hippies in an instant. He knew of his or her desperation for someone older and seemingly wiser that cared, so he put that costume on and grabbed his guitar. Manson may have been anti-social deep down, but he sure put on a show of support for a new generation. He was, by all accounts, quite the enticing procurer of very young women.

Followers had no selfhood of their own, and the drugs and the cult practices marred what was left. That much was obvious. Less clear were Manson's convoluted reasons for each of the murders. Had he just been putting everyone on? Leslie told Bill Farr, in retrospect, the truth had nothing to do with triggering a race war or a real revolution. Although that's what she was once duped into believing. It was the fantasy Manson made up as he went along, and he used it for control. Leslie fell for his con and so did many others—most pathetically, Vince Bugliosi, who bought the whole rap.

The *LA Times* interview with Leslie suggested that Manson's motives for the massacres at the homes of the Polanskis and the LaBiancas—complete with bloody writing on the walls—were to deliberately mislead the authorities. Manson was worried that, after his arrest, Bobby Beausoleil would implicate him for the murder of Hinman. So, in order to show Bobby how far he would go in his

defense, Charlie had innocent people slaughtered at 10050 Cielo Drive and the next night at random. This less than ingenious, irrepressible plan was intended to lead detectives into thinking they had arrested the wrong culprit. Charlie told his team of assassins to make it look like a series of murders committed by the same attack wing of the Black Panthers. I made a note to check this out further. I would start by asking Leslie.

In the late sixties, it wasn't hard to believe that a race war was about to begin. The Watts Rebellion in August 1965 had resulted in thirty-four deaths, more than a thousand injured and three times that many violent arrests. The streets were ablaze for six days and nights, and no one was certain if this was the end or just the beginning.

I went searching the library stacks for texts tangentially related to these saturnine interests of mine. (Some of that was a nasty surprise I will tell you about later.) I signed out books by Alan Watts, Eric Hoffer and Stanislav Grof. And, for articles from the *LA Times* and the *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs,* I took dimes and nickels to photocopy them. The first thing I did when I got back to the flat was to tape the *Times*' photo of Leslie to the wall in my room. No, I wasn't building an altar. But I did love the way she'd started to wear her bangs all the way down over her eyebrows. I caught myself looking at this image every now and then to study her eyes under that hood. Meanwhile, I read more about the year she spent under the spell of Charles Manson. A year can be a long time.

The Manson cult's bivouac at Spahn Ranch was really a semi-deserted assortment of ramshackle buildings, dusty dirt roads and a broken-down production set where old TV westerns used to be shot. It was a bit of a surprise finding out what a relatively small following of zealots he actually had at the time. There were only ten or so girls and less than half that many young men in Manson's diehard cadre of true believers. Then there were maybe another dozen or so who came and went on the margins. Not exactly the army I had previously imagined or was led to believe.

The really hard part for me wasn't just reading about the gangs or the weapons so much as the orgies. Manson would send the girls on reconnaissance missions to conscript new guys for the Family by bringing them back to the ranch. That's how, in fact, they hooked up with Beach Boy drummer Dennis Wilson. Leslie's friend, Patricia Krenwinkel, captured that jewel in the crown when she and another girl had their thumbs out by the side of the road, and Wilson stopped his Ferrari.

I found it cruel to imagine how an intelligent girl like Leslie could

put up with that way of life, given her noble standalone qualities. And, in terms of the desire to share intimacy in the form of *eros*, I had a hard time imagining how so many pretty girls would ever submit to sex with the likes of Charles Manson. But what did I know? It's easy to judge at a distance. My prejudices had to be cast aside to make room for the fact that these guys held special charms for Leslie—another puzzle without all the pieces.

Could all I was reading really be true? Sexually, there appears not to have been any limit to what the women would do for Charlie, the rest of the men or each other. When Charlie was done with a girl—sometimes in front of the troupe—he might turn her over to one or more others for dirty seconds. For Charlie, prostituting biddable girls through the ranks may have amused him. In any case, the girls' sole purpose was to be submissive to each of the men and particularly him. A lot depended on what drug-dealing bikers were willing to trade for the girls or for car parts.

Manson's chief procurement agent, Paul Watkins, described the orgies that took place, usually once or twice a week, saying they would always start out with peyote or acid. Charlie would dispense doses of drugs according to how much he wanted each person to take.

"Everything was done at Charlie's direction," Watkins told Bugliosi.

Several witnesses to these goings-on at Spahn Ranch testified in court as to Manson's canny ability to capitalize on an individual's hang-ups or desires. Some were there searching for sexual freedom and romantic adventure. This kind of ball game became Charlie's pastime. Like Jean said, everybody wants something wicked sometime. Just ask Roman Polanski.

When asked how Manson would usually go about "programming" someone, former Family member Brooks Poston said, "With a girl, it would usually start out with sex." Charlie might persuade a plain-featured girl that she was beautiful. Or, if she had a father fixation, have her imagine that he was her father. If a guy or girl was looking for a leader, he might imply that he was the second coming of Christ. When a man first joined the group, Poston added, Manson would take him on an LSD trip, ostensibly "to open his mind up." Then, while he was in such a highly credulous state, Charlie would talk about how he had to "surrender to love." How only by ceasing to exist as an individual "ego" could he become one with all things everlasting.

That wasn't all. If you stayed for the extravaganza, you might get to see Charlie Manson, aka Jesus Christ, having himself strapped to a crucifix. All the while, a young girl playing Mary Magdalene knelt and

cried at his feet, as he routinely acted out the passion play of Christ on the cross.

A seventeen-year-old Brooks Poston testified at the first trial that Manson's claim to divine status wasn't so much stated as implied. Charlie claimed to have lived two thousand years before and often referred to himself as both "God and the Devil."

Tex Watson described Manson as a *chameleon*. "And with each change he could be born anew...Hollywood slicker, jail tough, rock star, guru, child, tramp, angel, devil, son of God," Watson wrote in his book, *Will You Die For Me?*

This was a powerful question under any circumstances but especially if the right Beatles song happened to play just as you were peaking on acid.

* * *

The Park Plaza Hotel was a grand hotel located at the northwest corner of Bloor and Avenue Road across from the Royal Ontario Museum. Jean called up to the room and Martin Bijaux's brother, Guy, came down to the lobby to greet us. Guy was more fair-haired than his older brother and more boyish looking, with a thin frame and straight hair halfway down to his shoulders. I guessed he was in his early twenties, but he may have been slightly older.

Guy invited us up to his suite where he said he'd left a friend of his waiting. When we entered the room, he introduced us to Mike Palmer. The room had a spectacular view of the city lights facing south. All four of us stood at the window staring out at the city. When I was a kid growing up, the citadels of banks and office towers reminded me of giant crystals. The tallest buildings in the city are its church steeples, but, today, the banks are the true cathedrals of worship in our so-called free enterprise culture.

We all got to talking and drinking 50 ml bottles of liquors mixed with cans of soda from the mini bar. Before anyone said what the plan was on offer, Guy opened a duffle bag and pulled out a small box.

"Here it is," he said, when he found what he was looking for.

Guy unscrewed an engine-turned container with a polished plate of pink and blue elephant ivory adorning the top.

"Very elegant," I couldn't help saying. It really was precious.

"What's inside...even more so," Guy added.

"*What* is it?" Jean asked.

"Blotter acid," Mike said, as he leaned forward from the edge of the bed. "Pure LSD-25."

"Who wants a hit or two on the house?" Guy smiled, looking

around at each of our faces. Then, he pulled out a strip less than an inch long with measured doses lined in rows on one side of the paper.

Jean said, “This comes with the room service, does it?”

Guy laughed. Mike and I smiled.

I said, “I really shouldn’t be dropping anything this late in the evening. Not tonight. I need to sleep. I’m supposed to be somewhere by mid-day tomorrow.”

“It’s up to you,” Guy responded, as he carefully cut eight 4 mm squares with a pair of barber’s shears and lined them up in a row on the table. Each one had the image of a ripe strawberry on it, the notice of which made each of us smile after Mike pointed this out.

“Thanks, no. Really I shouldn’t,” I said, holding my hand up to tap my heart. “Not that it matters,” I threw in as an afterthought.

“Don’t be a wuss,” Jean said. I waved him off, so he put the rest of the blotters back in the jar.

“Mike works at the El Mocambo,” Guy said, changing the subject. “Word is Keith Richards may be there tonight, maybe playing with a band calling themselves the Cockroaches.”

“I can get us all in for the show,” Mike proudly added. “That’s where we’re planning to go.”

Jean looked enthusiastic.

Then, turning back to me, he said, “You’ll get enough sleep before dawn, Peter. Where’s your nerve for adventure? Afterwards, you can always take a couple of those pills you gave me the other night. That should chill you out and bring you down in plenty of time before dawn. This is an *event,* my friend. Let’s make a night of it.”

The three of them swallowed a whole blotter each, and Jean borrowed the scissors to cut his second piece in half. Then, suddenly, I changed my mind and let my good conscience go. On a reckless whim, I licked my finger, pressed it onto one of the halves, then washed it down with the last swigs of Mike Palmer’s Smirnoff and tonic. Whatever regrets I might have later, I’d crossed the Rubicon.

Walking out on to Bloor Street from the hotel an hour later, I asked Mike, “Isn’t Keith Richards supposed to be under ‘house arrest’ at his hotel?”

“Not exactly,” he said. He explained that police had detained The Rolling Stones guitarist in February, when he was charged with possession of twenty-odd grams of smack. That’s a lot. He and his girlfriend, Anita Pallenberg, and their three children had been detained in their suites at the Harbour Castle Hotel ever since without their passports.

“Heard tonight he’s plannin’ to be at the El Mo. It’s a kinda coming

out party. Who knows who else might show up?"

"Something I'd like to see," Jean announced.

We then talked about music, school and sundry before we headed out on foot down "Philosopher's Walk" behind the museum.

Turning to me, Jean asked, "Are you feeling anything yet?"

I shook my head. Then, only seconds later, I started to notice objects on each tumbling horizon seemed a bit closer and louder. I could also feel waves of vibration whenever a passerby came close to our party, especially as we made our way down the path between the Royal Conservatory of Music and the Faculty of Law at the University of Toronto.

The El Mocambo, or "El Mo" as it is known, was housed in a building first used as a safe house for American slaves escaping on the Underground Railroad. It's been a bar and music venue for more than a century since. The place stands on property south of College Street on the west side of Spadina Road. The El Mo is considered a stronghold of rock 'n rhythm and blues by savvy fans of the genre.

The club was packed tight to overflowing by the time that we got there. Music was pouring down the steps in a torrent. Mike's friends let us in, and one of them took us straight upstairs in no time at all. The place was bustling with excitement, and so was my mind as I really began to take off. There was no place left to sit. So, at first, we leaned on the wall beside the piano. The stage was set just a foot off the floor and the band was playing a yard from the edge of the crowd. In back of the stage, there was a sunset mural with palm trees that began bristling and spinning as I swept around.

I wasn't that big of a Stones fan myself, but I could see why their groupies adored them. I'd always liked the quiet detachment in the way Charlie Watts beat out his signature rhythms. There was a pianist right where we stood who none of us recognized. The same goes for the bassist, who was playing alongside the drummer. Up front, guitarists Ronnie Wood and Keith Richards were having a blast. Whiskey bottles adorned the tops of their amplifiers. Mick Jagger was singing and prancing between them. It wasn't just the firestorm of a crowd that appeared to be crackling and swelling. Jagger's jumpsuit was unzipped pretty far down with the pulse. The proud package below was done up so tight it looked like it might be about to bust out of its socket when he belted out the old blues travel advisory…telling me to "go take that California trip," on Route 66.

Familiar lyrics acquired new meaning. I, for one, started seeing things that seemed like they'd been there all along only darkly hidden. Even things at a distance came abruptly into focus instead of the other

way around. I'm not just figuratively speaking. After "Route 66," I began to feel a tinge claustrophobic and my skin started to crawl. Just a tingle at first, then I noticed myself either involuntarily clenching my teeth or starting to yawn. Everyone in our gang kept smiling and looked happy enough. I couldn't tell. My mind changed pilots so often. Nothing was certain. Whose mind was it after all? When I looked in the mirror after taking a break in the washroom, all I could see were the whites of my eyes inside the head of a wolf. He or she was as curious about me as I was about him or her. I couldn't tell its sex from its fangs or its snarls.

When I got back to my pack by the piano, I signaled that I had to be leaving. Jean tried to say something I couldn't quite comprehend—even if he had gotten all of his words out. I gestured and mouthed something to signal I'd be sure and give him a call.

Then, I waved goodbye to Guy and Mike and said, "Thanks again for taking us out."

I turned and bumped into the Hindu goddess, Annapurna, and she gave me an instant hard on I swear it. As I writhed my way down the stairs, a dark-haired woman's face came close to mine, and I noticed something odd but strangely familiar about her. When I looked back, I could see diamond-crusted dragonflies chasing each other around her eyes where there should have been lashes.

7

"PLEASE TELL ME YOU'VE MISSED ME"

The radiators moaned all night and the house shivered like a dog asleep dreaming. I toughed it out and just kept rolling along into

dawn. At first the daylight made every object—including myself—appear out-of-rest and in continuous motion. Then, I'd close my eyes for an instant. When I opened them again, everything ground to a halt. My jaw ached from hours of clenching. So I prescribed myself a joint, a fist full of aspirin, and brewed mugs of scorching hot coffee to wash them down. I kept trying in vain to remember all of the last night's ineffable, dazzling bright moments and wrote down what I could recall in a letter to Leslie, *sans* the acid.

I managed to fake my way through the indoor track meet that day at the Canadian National Exhibition. The University of Toronto Blues won the overall Ontario universities' Guthrie Trophy, which Buck and some of the guys brought with them to celebrations that evening at the Bay Street Groaning Board. We were so far ahead early on that I hadn't stayed to the end. I was happy my friends did so well though, but I slipped away early when it no longer mattered if each of our relay teams dropped their batons. We still would have won. Despite the elation of feeling a small part of it all, I realized there was nothing left for me now in terms of competitive athletics but to watch just like any other spectator. That thought made me feel just a bit sad and dejected. I felt the same way about leaving athletics as I felt leaving the farm. We truly do not know what we've got 'til it's gone. And that's a shame.

I heard the telephone ringing, when I staggered back to my flat. I needed to sleep, so I ignored it.

First thing Sunday morning, the phone was ringing again. It was Jean.

I asked him, "How'd you boys make it out of the El Mo after I left?"

"You should have stayed for the masquerade that unfolded," he said. "Mike introduced us to some beautiful people he knows. Some of the ladies were quite fascinating creatures. It was a lot of fun. Guy and Mike were still there when I left. I grabbed a cab and went home about four in the morning.

"How about you, Peter? How did things go? What did you do after you left the club?"

"Drifted around. Sat in Queen's Park for a while in front of John Simcoe's statue. Had a lot on my mind. But I'm not sure where it all went. Tried writing. No luck. I'm making no sense, am I?"

Then, I thought I heard someone else in the background, so I asked him, "When does Gabe get back to town?"

"Yes, we should make a date to go out soon. See another film or something. I'll call you and arrange it. Oh! Wait, Peter! I almost

forgot. Did you hear who else was there at the El Mo last night? Did you see her? The prime minister's wife, Maggie Trudeau!"

I thought to ask him again about Gabrielle but thought better of it. Instead, I went along with the ride.

"Did you say you saw Margaret Trudeau?" I had my doubts, but it turned out Jean was right. She had been there that night, as a guest of Ron Wood and the Stones. Everyone wants something wicked sometime.

"I guess I should have asked Maggie, 'What's with the dragonflies?'"

"Huh? Ah…yeah, but poor Pierre though, eh?" Jean said. "Imagine. Our PM…a cuckold!"

I said, "It won't surprise me if this spells the end to their marriage. Sounds as though there's trouble in paradise. It makes you think though, doesn't it? About marriage I mean. There's always tears at the end of it."

When what I was saying sounded back and sank in, I couldn't just leave it alone. So I added, "And with each new beginning there's always the risk of betrayal, eh Jean?"

Soon after that he hung up. I couldn't think why so abruptly, until later.

"Kisses for Gabrielle," I said aloud into a hollow receiver.

The whole time we were on the telephone talking, I was cutting out horoscopes, photos and quotes from *Newsweek* and February's *Playboy* interview with Alex Haley. As was my habit, I kept a shoebox of clippings and pictures I'd glue or Scotch tape to the pages and envelopes I was sending to Leslie. Some of my letters looked like the pages in Marshall McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride*—photos and drawings, plus lines I stole from drunken poets like Charles Bukowski. *Everybody is always angry about the truth, though they claim to believe in it.* Wisdom that I applied to thinking about Leslie's prosecution.

For the next couple of weeks, I remained busy with my studies and more practice teaching. Track and field would soon be over for me by the end of the school year. Then what? If not summer school at OISE, then why not travel abroad for the summer? 'Find myself'—as they say. Somehow finding myself felt tied or combined to finding out more about Ms. Van Houten. Time to get hip to Jagger's kindly tip and go take that California trip?

Jean and Gabrielle stopped by the track one Tuesday night near the end of a workout. We three grabbed a bite to eat, got high and went

to a movie. We went to see *Bound for Glory* and stayed up half the night talking about each other's personal sufferings and life's hesitations. Predictably, I made a connection between Woody Guthrie's yearnings for fame in Hal Ashby's film and something else I'd recently seen in one of the books I was reading. The late Sharon Tate's widower, Roman Polanski, was early on quoted as saying that he believed the *real motive* for his wife's ill-starred murder was Charlie Manson's bitter envy towards those whose talents led them to the kinds of wealth and recognition that were denied him. A pretty astute take on the case, if you ask me. I'd always thought Vincent Bugliosi was far less swift than Mr. Polanski from the get-go.

A few days after that, the news broke out of LA that Roman Polanski had been arrested and charged with raping a thirteen-year-old girl at the home of his friend and actor, Jack Nicholson. The young teenaged model was Samantha Gailey. who, at the time the alleged offenses took place, Polanski had been commissioned to photograph for *Vogue* magazine. News agencies the world over listed a broad spectrum of escorting charges, such as furnishing a controlled substance to a minor (quaaludes and champagne), performing lascivious acts with a minor (including sexual intercourse), gross perversion (rape by use of drugs) and so on and so forth. They threw the proverbial book at him—quite a headline.

After going without a man since the gangbanging she took at Spahn Ranch in the sixties, one had to wonder what kind of man Leslie would be attracted to nowadays. Who, besides lawyers, journalists, psychiatrists, or chain-smoking bulldaggers, were her choices, if any? Yours truly wasn't like any of the men she'd known before—certainly not Misters Manson and Beausoleil. I understood very little or nothing about why young girls find guys with guitars and a song so appealing. Gods—listen to me—I was beginning to advertise like Waldo Lydecker in *Laura.*

Leslie did mention a favorite teacher, a "Professor Malone," whom she said had become a good friend and a role model. He taught English lit at the prison in Frontera, and Leslie said that she wanted me to meet him. I wrote her saying I hoped that meeting Michael might give me a better sense of what kind of man she was currently into. English teacher, eh? That might be a good clue for starters.

* * *

I'd read how a couple of Leslie's former boyfriends had moved to Los Angeles with the same dreams and ambitions in mind. Both Bobby Beausoleil and Charlie Manson imagined themselves making inroads into the recording industry. The whole reason Manson decided to move his Family to LA in the first place was to make a name for himself in rock music. Both he and Bobby felt they had all the talent they needed in hand. What they lacked were contacts directly inside the business.

Then, along comes Dennis Wilson of the rock band The Beach Boys, driving his silver GT 250 Ferrari. Wilson stopped one day to pick up Patricia Krenwinkel and another Manson girl called 'Yeller,' who had their thumbs out. The girls went with Dennis back to his place for a full-on sexual frolic like the threesome in *A Clockwork Orange*—the scene Stanley Kubrick set to the rhythm of the "William Tell Overture" in fast forward.

The Manson girls didn't really know who Wilson was, but, when they told Charlie about the event, he knew right away what that meant. He insisted the girls take him and the rest of the Family back to Wilson's house at 14400 Sunset Boulevard—a beautiful log cabin estate first owned by Will Rogers. It was similar, in fact, to the one Wilson's friend, Terry Melcher, rented with his girlfriend actress Candice Bergen way up in the clouds above Benedict Canyon.

When Dennis pulled into the driveway, he could already hear loud Beatles music playing and noticed a party going on with his house full of girls running 'round naked. When he opened the door, there stood all five feet two-and-a-half inches of Charlie Manson. Manson dropped to his knees to pay homage to a rock and roll legend, first by kissing his feet, then by offering Dennis drugs and whatever, or whomever, however often he wanted. He was welcomed to have all the girls one at a time or in countless formations.

Since the girls reliably proved themselves willing to engage in whatever drug-induced sexual fantasies Dennis desired, The Beach Boys drummer consented to Charlie and these nubile groupies staying at his house, eating his food, driving his cars, and peeing in his pool, if they had to. Not known for his brains, style, or good sense, Dennis thought Charlie was some kind of deep thinker. But, more than that, he was seduced by the orgies Manson set up for him and his friends who fancied chasing sexy, naked sprites and fairies around the pool. Someone should have thought to invite Roman Polanski.

Before what there was left of Wilson's milk of human kindness had completely run dry, Manson put the bite on every celebrity musician who showed up at Dennis' door looking for a party. Besides Dennis'

famous brother, Beach Boys composer Brian Wilson, Manson was introduced to another *bona fide* rock legend at the house, Neil Young. One time when Young came by the house, he tried to improvise a few chords on the guitar to go with the insane lyrics that Charlie made up on the spot.

And, later on in the recording studio that Brian Wilson had in his house, Dennis had an engineer try to record some of Charlie's singing and playing. One song Charlie thought would make him a star was sophomorically titled, "Ego is a Too Much Thing." At least he was partially right about something. But, of course, nothing came of the demo.

Regardless, Manson kept on bugging everyone to help find him a record deal with some major label. He had started to piss some people off. People like Mo Ostin of Warner Brothers Records had heard the demo and said they weren't interested. However, Terry Melcher, a musical producer at Columbia with more than eighty top-selling hits to his name (including those by The Byrds and Paul Revere and the Raiders), hired Dennis Wilson's friend Gregg Jakobson to find him new talent. In exchange for getting him stoned and laid on a whim, Jakobson promised Manson he would bring Terry Melcher to hear Charlie sing.

Dennis Wilson and Gregg Jakobson finally succeeded in dragging music producer Terry Melcher to Spahn Ranch to give Charlie Manson a listen—complete with a backup chorus of naked strippers that Charlie choreographed for himself.

Jakobson said he hoped to capture the "spell" Manson and Beausoleil had cast over their rapt cult of women. But, reading this, I got the impression Jakobson might just be trying to get himself laid.

Charlie felt sure a recording contract would be soon to follow once Melcher heard him play, and he told the girls what they must do to help make this happen. Although Melcher's assessment was that the music did not merit further time or investment—not to appear rude or ungrateful—the producer shone Charlie on.

"You're good," he said, "but I wouldn't know what to do with you."

Of course, Melcher never returned any of Manson's phone calls, hoping that he'd get the message. He got it all right, but it wouldn't suffice. Not by a long shot.

As Melcher and Wilson were leaving Spahn Ranch, Manson invited himself along for the ride. He took his guitar and hopped into the jump seat of Wilson's Ferrari. When they drove Melcher home, Charlie got out to see where the son of Doris Day lived with his girlfriend

Candice Bergen. He wasn't invited in.

He and Tex Watson returned to that same address (10050 Cielo Drive) more than a few times after that, ostensibly looking for Melcher, even after Terry had moved out and the Polanskis had taken the residence over. And since Melcher kept putting him off (in order to save face), Manson reframed this rejection as an insufferable *treason*. And you know what they do to traitors.

Terry Melcher returned once again to hear Charlie audition at Spahn Ranch. Not so much because he'd changed his mind about Manson's singing, but because he was partial to having sex with a cutely attractive, precocious teen named Ruth Ann Moorehouse, aka 'Quisch.' Her name was derived from the sound most men made the first time they saw her: "Ooh whee!" Unlike Dennis Wilson—who would do just about anyone—and Gregg Jakobson who was happy to lick up the leftovers, Melcher promised to return to hear Manson audition in exchange for another romp. Somehow Candice Bergen caught on and put the nix in on that. She knew what was going on with Terry even if Charlie didn't. And however groovy Charlie's songs may have sounded to fanatics ripped on mesc and meth at the ranch, Manson's songs made little impact on a veteran critic like Melcher. He went for the Quisch, not the magic.

When Melcher didn't show up as planned, Manson went ballistic. His unwarranted sense of prerogative made him high dudgeon and fuming over this blatant rejection. He was frantic to find Terry and bring him back to the ranch so he might save face with his brethren. He drove to the house at 10050 Cielo Drive, but Melcher didn't live there anymore. The landlord, business agent Rudi Altobelli (who was washing up in the guest house) asked Charlie to leave.

The next day, during a flight to Rome, Sharon Tate asked Altobelli, "Did that creepy-looking guy come back there to see you?"

She had been face-to-face with the Devil himself.

In order to save face and keep faith with his followers, Manson made up a tale about Melcher having deliberately betrayed him and the Family. Charlie made Terry into a villain of Biblical proportions, saying he'd promised a contract for lots of money then reneged for no reason. Surely treachery of such magnitude must be a sign of the oncoming Apocalypse? For support, Manson referred his followers to what was proclaimed by The Beatles as well as the *Bible*. All the more reason, Manson told his disciples, for them to ready themselves and surrender to the divine magistrate of Helter Skelter. It was on.

Being on peyote and singing along around the campfire, Charlie's visions and songs may have sounded like prophecy, but, deep down,

Manson's take on "Helter Skelter" was primarily an excuse for settling a score. And being a con man *par excellence*, he could make up a legend as he went along. He wanted to scare the bejesus out of everyone and get Beausoleil to clam up about who ordered the hit on Hinman and why. Besides sending Terry Melcher, Dennis Wilson and their stripe a pretty clear message, Charlie thought he could combine this myth with a plot to get Beausoleil out of jail or at least make Bobby think so. So he and the others would keep quiet about such goings on.

It angered Manson, who liked his followers to think of him as the 'fifth Beatle', when his message wasn't embraced—let alone paid no attention at all. But who could blame Terry Melcher for passing on songs with such lines as "Cease to exist?" Pretty telling—though not exactly "Cortez the Killer."

It didn't matter how many drugs you had taken. Manson's lyrics all sound like gibberish to me, and I've written a few bad poems in my time. Except that a very pretty girl I was eager to know better had at one time taken this runt and his wearisome banter to heart. So what did I know? Dennis Wilson thought he saw something in Charlie's song about getting a girl to submit herself and let go her ego to the point that she ceased to exist. Working on his own, Wilson recast the lyrics. In his version, the singer is asking the girl to cease to *resist*—which was more to his liking. He changed the title to "Never Learn Not to Love," and he and his brothers, The Beach Boys, recorded the song on their label. Thinking about the hundreds of thousands of dollars the Manson Family's invasion had already cost him, Dennis listed himself as sole composer, cutting Charlie out.

When Wilson told Manson that he'd recorded his song with The Beach Boys, Charlie at first was elated. He expected "Cease to Exist" to appear on the next Beach Boys album that winter. But instead, The Beach Boys released "Never Learn Not to Love" as the B-side of their new single, "Bluebirds over the Mountain." And, of course, there was no mention of Charles Manson.

To Charlie, this represented yet another timeless disloyalty in the long saga of persecution he'd claimed to have suffered for thousands of years. There was sure to be hellfire and fury whipped upon the backsides of those rich and famous that dared dick around with the Devil.

According to what Jakobson later wrote in *Rolling Stone* under a pseudonym, Charlie once gave Gregg a .44 caliber slug to pass along.

“Tell Dennis I got one more for him,” said Manson.

In another credible report, Manson once held a knife to Wilson’s throat and asked, “How would you like if I killed you?”

Wilson tested, “Go ahead, do it.”

Fortunately for him, Charlie was more mouth than action. He’d always pissed far more than he’d drunk.

Wilson eventually cut his loses. Finally sick of all the theft, destruction and lies visited upon him by these worm-festered squatters, Dennis defaulted on his lease and left the Manson clan there on their own to await the sheriff’s eviction. All tallied—what with all the stolen items, dental treatments and serious damage to an uninsured Mercedes-Benz—Dennis Wilson was out hundreds of thousands of dollars. The medical bills alone had been staggering, especially after the girls all suffered an outbreak of virulent gonorrhea.

After they were kicked out of the house on Sunset Boulevard, things back at the ranch with Charles Manson became even more crazy and violent. One sign of the changes taking place at the end of the summer of ’69 was how obsessively Manson kept playing The Beatles *White Album* over and over again with everyone tripping like mad whores on acid. He’d program these malleable teens with endless mantras and repetitions.

“Can you hear it? Can you hear it? Can you hear it? They’re speaking to me. They’re speaking to me. They’re speaking to me…”

Crap upon piles of crap like that *ad infinitum*. Can you imagine the effect that would have on your mind over time? Especially if you’d taken to dropping a hit or two of pure white Owsley acid?

Sometimes Manson needed more than drugs and hypnotic suggestion to keep the stronger-willed girls like Leslie and Patricia in line. That’s why he kept them away from outside influences that might challenge the dogmas he was spewing.

More and more of Manson’s canons had to be memorized. Junk like: society is corrupt; forget everything your parents and teachers taught you; there is no right or wrong, good or evil; life and death are the same thing; death is the next step on the way to creating a better life. What a mix: naked nymphs, programmed ego killing and moral abandonment. Something for the whole Family.

And Manson had other more conventional ways too of weaving his evil magic. Once, when Pat Krenwinkel managed to escape and get pretty far away, somehow he found her. (Just how far she got I’d be sure to ask Leslie.) That fact alone was enough to frighten her into believing there was no escaping his power. And one time when Leslie

had been grumbling about being ordered to have sex with some of the bikers, Charlie threw her into his dune buggy and drove to the top of the Santa Susana Pass, where he dragged her to the edge of a steep cliff and told her, “If you want to leave me, go ahead jump.” Because that was her only alternative to staying. So Leslie ended up staying so long and doing so much and many drugs that it no longer mattered. She had little individual sense of self left and what there was had nowhere else to go at the time.

* * *

Throughout the last half of 1969, the ranch owner George Spahn had begun asking his men to run an increasingly violent, deluded and megalomaniacal Charles Manson and his Family off of his property. This was being encouraged in particular by one of his ranch hands, Donald ‘Shorty’ Shea. The big record deal Manson was counting on never ensued and the Family had already been kicked out of Wilson’s cabin on Sunset Boulevard. Things weren’t looking so rosy for Charlie.

When his preordained stardom just wasn’t happening, Charlie became ever-more paranoid and violent. He could feel the heat closing in. He knew he would need lots of money to pack up his Family and hide out in Death Valley. That is, before the Black Panthers invaded Spahn Ranch and attacked him. Because those were the kinds of delusions this bozo was under. Because Charlie Manson was a racist, his hallucinations tended to take that form. That’s what you see when you’re on acid. The distinction between what’s going on inside you and what you see on the outside become blended, blurred and disturbed.

Members of the Straight Satans motorcycle gang were of course similarly racist outlaws whom Manson hoped would become his protectors. They were planning a wild and wicked orgy up at the ranch one summer weekend. So they sent Bobby Beausoleil to buy a thousand tabs of mescaline from his “friend” Gary Hinman. Hinman, who in addition to going to graduate school at UCLA, manufactured his own methamphetamine and mescaline in the lab in his basement. The bikers later claimed the drugs were tainted and demanded their money back. So Manson seized this opportunity to embezzle even more cash from Gary, who was rumored to have recently inherited tens of thousands of dollars. At least that’s what Mary Brunner had heard and passed on to Manson.

On July 25, 1969, just two weeks before the killings at 10050 Cielo Drive and 3301 Waverly Drive, Charles Manson sent Bobby Beausoleil,

Susan Atkins, and Mary Brunner (the mother of Manson's child) to pay Hinman a visit at his house in Topanga Canyon. Since at one time they had acted as friends, at first there was no cause for alarm. Bobby had often used Gary's place as a crash pad to hang out, fuck around and do drugs. But very soon the intruders, who came armed with a knife and a gun, began demanding their money back for the mescaline Hinman had sold them to pass on to the Satans.

When Hinman tried to grab the gun from Susan Atkins's hand, it went off without hitting anyone. But, for even making the attempt to free himself, Beausoleil lit into Hinman and issued him a terrible beating. Gary still insisted he didn't have any money to give them so they tied him to a chair and cuffed him. When he continued to resist, the whole gang took turns hammering him in the face until he eventually turned over the titles and keys to his Volkswagen and Fiat. Hinman signed them away all right, but threatened to call the police once the invaders finally left him alone. A frustrated Bobby Beausoleil telephoned Charlie back at the ranch. Manson came over with cult member Bruce Davis and brought with him a razor-sharp sword.

Manson knew if Hinman were to tell the police about all the drug and car theft dealings he had with the Straight Satans, it might lead them to investigate the shooting of Bernard Crowe, aka 'Lotsapoppa,' whom Manson shot and presumed he had killed only weeks before over another drug deal gone sour. Charlie had sent Tex Watson to promise suspected Black Panther associate Lotsapoppa twenty-five kilos of marijuana. They kept the $2,500 they were fronted but never delivered the pot. Crowe told them if he didn't get his weed or his money back, he was coming up to Spahn Ranch with some pipe-wielding brothers to kill the whole Family. That's when Charlie shot him.

Crowe survived the gunshot and never involved the police, so nobody knew—certainly not Manson, who had boasted to Family members that he'd offed a Black Panther. He hoped it would serve as a warning to others. He also worried it may have marked him for dead with the Panthers. So, in exchange for unlimited party favors with any of the girls, the Straight Satans furnished Manson with bayonets, machetes, handguns, shotguns, rifles and ammo—not a lot, but plenty enough to create havoc. That's where Charlie got the sword he would use to scare Gary Hinman.

Charlie threatened that if Hinman didn't cough up all the money and shut up about the police, he was going to cut him to pieces. Hinman warned again that he would go to the cops if they didn't leave him alone. So Charlie took his sword and struck a five-inch gash

across Gary's face that nearly sliced off his left ear. The man's face was a bloody mess. Gary was crying and the girls were screaming and pleading with him to put an end to his own suffering. Just give them the money and be done with it.

Gary refused. Manson ordered Susan and Mary to sew up Hinman's wounds and clean up the blood. Bobby stood watch. Charlie told him to keep putting on the heat. After Manson and Davis split from the scene (Charlie stole Hinman's Volkswagen presumably to give to the Satans as compensation for the thousand bucks they'd paid for the drugs.), Atkins and Brunner stitched up Gary's ear with a sewing needle and dental floss. Charlie left instructions for Bobby to keep up the torture and pain until Hinman succumbed.

The torment finally ended, but not abruptly, on Sunday, July 27th, after Bobby called Charlie one last time to say the torture tactic still wasn't working.

Over the phone, Manson told Beausoleil to kill Gary Hinman, adding, "He knows too much."

Hinman would not be the last person Charlie Manson condemned for that reason.

Hinman was stabbed five times in the chest. One or two of the wounds penetrated the sac surrounding his heart. He bled to death but not very quickly. His trio of tormentors watched for hours as he slipped into a coma, but Hinman's lungs stubbornly continued to go on breathing, soaked as they were in his own blood. Bobby and each of the girls finally took turns smothering him with a pillow until his heart stopped beating. Once they were certain he was dead, they used his blood to write "POLITICAL PIGGY" on the wall. Bobby drew the insignia of a paw print with claws, assuming it would lead dimwitted authorities to suspect black militants were involved with the murder. Those were Manson's instructions.

Since the Panthers' threat he imagined had weighed heavily on Manson lately, and ever since he shot Lotsapoppa, he wanted detectives to think the Black militants had butchered Hinman over some awful drug deal gone wrong. Thus began both the real and the fake Helter Skelter. This was not a real revolution at all but rather the scam Charlie Manson used to get others to do his rancorous bidding. It was all about vengeance, paranoid delusions and money, despite what Bugliosi might have led us to think. All that shit about Helter Skelter as a race war was just a ruse.

When they hadn't heard from him for a week, Gary's friends went up to his house in Topanga and the first thing they noticed were the bustling torrents of insects flying in and out of the windows. Both cars

were gone. Inside, they discovered the walls and floors splashed with blood and imprinted with gory inscriptions. What was left of Mr. Hinman's corpse was shrouded in blankets of champing maggots. The whole house was thick with whirling storm clouds of red-eyed flesh flies buzzing around, like squadrons of evil jet fighters.

As ingenious and cunning as Manson and Beausoleil thought their plan was to mislead police into suspecting the Panthers may have seemed at the time, the cops didn't buy it. Beausoleil was headed north on the run in Hinman's Fiat when the car broke down. Highway patrolmen ran a check of the vehicle's registration and were notified that an APB had been issued in connection with a murder. When they searched the car, police found a bloody knife in the tire well, which tests revealed had Hinman's blood on it. They arrested and charged this criminal mastermind with cold-blooded murder.

Naturally, Charlie was worried that Bobby would cough him up to the cops. So he assured him that he had a foolproof plan for getting him off. That's what led to the "copycat" murders at the homes of Tate and the LaBiancas, making it look like whomever killed Hinman was still out there cutting up white people's bodies and leaving their ritual insignia on the walls in their victims' blood.

Bobby Beausoleil was tried for the murder of Gary Hinman in November of 1969, and, remarkably, that trial ended in a hung jury. That was odd. But that just goes to show how far a pretty face can get you in Hollywood, particularly since the dunce left a bloody fingerprint at the crime scene. However, during his retrial in 1970—in return for testifying to Beausoleil's and Atkins's torture and killing of Hinman—Mary Brunner was granted complete immunity for her role in aiding and abetting his murder. This time the jury found Beausoleil guilty of first-degree murder and sentenced him to the death chamber. His sentence was later commuted to life in prison along with all the other Manson Family members who were later convicted in 1971.

There were, in fact, nine victims in the Manson mass murders all told over a period of four weeks (from July 27th to August 26th, 1969): Gary Hinman, Stephen Parent, Voytek Frykowski, Jay Sebring, Abigail Folger, Sharon Tate Polanski, Leno LaBianca, Rosemary LaBianca and Donald 'Shorty' Shea.

* * *

Leslie's retrial was well underway in the spring. Sometimes news in the *LA Times* was delayed in getting to me, as were so many of Leslie's

letters. I read how Deputy District Attorney Stephen Kay, who assisted Vincent Bugliosi during the first trial, was now in charge of her second prosecution. Leslie said she could see right from the start that Kay thought it all right to play dirty. In his eyes, she was still a "Manson girl" after all.

For instance, Kay requested that testimony she had given in the penalty phase of the first trial be read again to the new jury. Maxwell Keith objected, saying his client's earlier testimony in 1971 was *deliberately* "false and misleading." It had been established by then that Leslie was coerced into "a pathetic attempt to exonerate Manson and immolate herself," Keith protested.

I could imagine Kay smirking, but he stuck to his guns.

Leslie testified she lied on the stand because that's what Manson told her to do. At one point, she said Charlie leaned over the counsel table and told her to say she'd been at Gary Hinman's house the day he was murdered. Manson told her to get the story straight from Susan Atkins. But now, (in 1977) she said the reason she lied six years before about what really happened at the LaBiancas was to help Charlie and Tex get off, because Manson had impressed upon her and the others for over a year how *essential* it was for him to be free to serve as *Man's son*, our savior. If that isn't crazy, what is? The real comic-tragedy to that part of this farce was that she ever believed him. Manson's tactics were the same ones that terrorists and the CIA use: drugs, isolation and deep hypnosis—the trifecta of mind control.

Leslie's trial continued through April and sometimes letters from her would arrive two and three at a time. I wrote her back almost every other day with as many questions as I had news. She wanted to know when I was planning to travel to LA to meet her. Now that was a thought. I would have more than a month off before grad school started that summer—assuming I was admitted. I had my fingers crossed on both of those fronts.

She wrote quite a lot about her old friends from high school—certainly more than she did about the many lawyers and journalists who presently crowded their way in to see her. She had nice things to say about her attorney, Max, and a famous psychiatrist from Harvard named Lester Grinspoon. She also gave me the names and numbers of those to call when I got to LA and told me to be sure I got in touch with her best friend, Linda Grippi. I took down all her contact information.

I also wrote Leslie back about the ongoing dramas at teacher's

college, late night hockey fights and the quarrel between philosophy and poetry ever since Plato. I mentioned that thinking more deeply about her life was like seeing parts of myself in a mirror. (Remember what Zeus said to Narcissus? 'Watch yourself.') As well, I described how my friends Gabrielle and Jean had recently discovered each other and how unbothered I was about all of that now.

With nothing to hide, I wrote with regard to my dreams and my fears, and tried to impress her with the books I was reading, the films I was seeing and the poems I was rehearsing. I shared intuitions I thought she would like and appreciate from her own perspective. For instance, in one letter I combined my interest in Hesse's novel *Siddhartha* with my take on Bergman's film *Scenes From a Marriage*. I was all over the map. I even went so far as to boldly quote the beginning and end of my favorite Mark Strand sonnet, "Courtship."

During the first weeks of April, the tail end of winter had bitten back hard with a blizzard. I didn't mind. I knew winter would be over soon, and I'd be back in the open more often. On morning runs, it felt good to breathe the sour-sweet scent of snowmelt still caught in the evergreen branches. There was a good luck new moon still rising on Wednesday, April 20th when I got the news from the registrar's office at OISE. I'd been *accepted* into the Master of Arts program in the history and philosophy of higher education. *Woo hoo!* I could begin in the summer.

The first person with whom I wanted to share this newsflash was Leslie. So, on my way to Hart House that morning to tell Andy, I stopped in the campus Bookroom to shop for some new stationary.

After training, I was anxious to get back home and write Leslie a long letter, which I signed off by saying, "I'm coming to see you next month! Please tell your friend Linda I'll call when I get there. You know I'm a fool for you, girl." Then, I taped a tiny magazine photo of Marlon Brando from *The Fugitive Kind* to the outside of the envelope.

Throughout the spring, I kept up my steady routines at both school and at play. I handed in essays and competed in competitive tournament hockey. Jean, Gabe and I got together more often as time went on. Sometimes, Karen or Buck and that new girlfriend of his (I've long since forgotten her name) tagged along for a movie and pizza afterwards. One Friday night late in April, we had all planned to go to see Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger*, starring Jack Nicholson

and Maria Schneider. Then, Jean called to say that he and Gabe couldn't make it, so I arranged instead to go with Karen and her new boyfriend.

Richard was a tall, strapping Aryan whom Karen met at a party at Upper Canada College, a prestigious private school for the rich and exceedingly privileged, where he taught science and math.

Just as we were cooling down from the workout, Karen and Richard showed up and met me inside the stadium. They waited while I showered and dressed. The film was playing just down the street at the Varsity theater. After the movie, we went back to the sparsely crowded basement enclave of the Arbor Room in Hart House for coffee and pastries. At first, we were all talking at once about the death of Nicholson's character at the end of the movie.

Karen asked, "Was it Locke or Robertson who was killed at the hotel? I guess it was Locke, so why my confusion?"

Personally, I thought this was a provocative question. But Richard scoffed. He was quick to change the subject back to the more technical aspects of Antonioni's famous tracking shot at the end of the film.

The assassination takes place off screen. First, the camera's point of view backs out of the room in which Nicholson's character is alone, alive at first, lying in bed. As the camera turns out into the dusty parking lot outside, we hear a car arrive, and a crew of thugs rush into the hotel. Later, we hear doors slam, and the car drives away. Then, a full minute or more later, the camera travels back into the room again. We see the girl, played by Maria Schneider, rush in. She identifies the tepid deceased to police as David Robertson. Then, Locke's wife, Rachel, arrives looking for her husband, David. Viewing the corpse on the bed, she says she never knew the man lying there dead as a doornail.

"In a way, they were both right," I said at last. "David Locke had become the passenger in another man's life."

Karen asked Richard, "How do you think the director got his camera through those bars in the windows?"

She offhandedly ignored the point I was trying to explore. I couldn't care less about such mechanical matters as camerawork. What interested me was the director's making sense of the human desire to adopt a new identity when the old one is no longer working. That's what this film was about.

I tried steering the conversation back to the thoughts I was having about how a complete break from the past in this way inevitably leads to self-destruction. Or does it? To myself, I thought maybe that's what happened to Leslie when she ran off from home. I didn't say it aloud

since no one was listening. Karen was too into Dick, and Dick was too into himself. Fair enough—I knew how he felt.

So, eventually, we got to talk about other matters—things such as teaching (of course), graduate school (yeah, sure) and the Olympics. I eventually steered the conversation around to a discussion of Antonioni's other films, such as *Blow Up* and *L'Avventura*.

Finally, I maneuvered Karen into asking me, "Peter, do tell us...What have you heard lately from your *pen pal* in prison?"

Before I could answer, she gave Richard a précis of my faint involvement with Leslie Van Houten. I could see he was not favorably awestruck with either one of us, Leslie or me.

"I'd rather speak for myself," I bristled at Karen.

But before I did, I could see Richard reacting with some irritation. I returned him the favor.

"Sounds to me like you're the type who's obsessed with celebrity murder," he finally remarked.

I could tell he was holding something back.

"Think whatever you care to," is all I said for the moment.

I gathered up our empty coffee cups, plates and wrappers, and carried the trays back to the counter. Karen and Richard had their jackets on when I got back to the table. No need to have a sign posted.

"So we're calling it a night, are we? Good," I said, letting them get ahead.

When I started out of the Arbor Room, Karen and Dick were standing outside in front of the door still trying to decide something. So I asked them which way they were headed. Karen affirmed they were taking the subway to Richard's, so I suggested we walk that way together.

By the time we reached the museum, Richard brought up the subject of Leslie again.

"Tell me, Peter. You don't honestly think Van Houten stands one chance in hell of *ever* getting out of prison, do you? God, I hope not. If you do, you must be a fool."

I paused and shot him a look before I responded.

"Even a verdict of second-degree murder would improve her chances of getting out sooner than never," I said. "After all the money and billable time that's been spent to convict her, I think it's time we paid some attention to Leslie's side of the story, that's all, *then* decide when she should be let out, not beforehand. Who's being foolish?"

Richard asked, "Does anyone even care anymore? I think this entire Manson saga is best forgotten once and for all."

I was reminded that everyone is entitled to an uninformed opinion.

Even him—even me—so I let it go.

"I'm sorry, Peter. I don't get it," Karen intervened. "Why would anyone let a sick fuck like Manson use them like that? My God. After all, what a madman. Was this girl *crazy*?"

"Temporarily, I think so. I also think the real reason Leslie was willing to go along that night, and Manson knew that she would, was out of loyalty to her best friend, Patricia Krenwinkel. If Pat was strong enough to kill for a cause they both thought was real and noble enough to believe in, I'm sure Leslie wanted to prove to Charlie that she was just as fearless as Pat. These kids were idealists before Manson met them."

Karen asked, "Do you think Pat told Leslie what happened the night before they went into LaBiancas'?"

"I don't know for sure, but I'll remember to ask her. You're right. Pat had taken an active part in what came to pass with Sharon Tate and the others. Leslie knew nothing about it until after the others were through carrying out orders. Charlie told the killers to keep shut, but the word went around anyway."

"Are you fucking nuts? You can't be serious!" Richard pushed. "How can you say all that and still *possibly* defend what she did?"

Karen pressed one hand on his forearm, trying to settle him down.

"He's as crazy as she was," he told her.

Karen said, "Let's cut the crap, shall we? Can we just be quiet or else go back to discussing *The Passenger* for a moment?"

"Or let's just call it a night," he said.

"Not a chance," I said, stepping in front of them both and making them stop. "Listen, Dick. Let me ask you something. Based on what you *think* you know. Would you say that what the Manson gang did is something *rational* people would do? If the answer is 'no,' then that's partly Leslie's defense. *Capisca*?

"Leslie wasn't the perpetrator of any crime. The guilt for that belongs solely to Manson," I said in a far more gentle tone.

"I think you're daft," Richard snapped back.

"Richard, I don't know you. Since we just met, I'll try to forget how rude I find your attitude."

After thinking this over, I had a change of heart and added, "No. On second thought, I won't forget. So why don't you just go fuck yourself? Because if you don't shut the fuck up I'm going to hurt more than your feelings."

He and Karen both looked alarmed. I turned and stormed off in the opposite direction.

My real problem wasn't just a quick and often unreasonably

violent temper—though I did inherit a lot of bad blood from my father's side of the family. That's just the background. My real frustration was that I didn't yet know enough about Leslie's case to speak confidently about it. Don't look back, I thought, only I did one last time to see Dick and Karen had disappeared into the underground, cursing. Hearing their echoes bounce off the tiles in the subway put a smile on my face. I didn't like him.

On Monday, May 16th, I posted another letter to Leslie which began, "I'll be there to see you in person before you even receive this …"

A letter from her arrived the same day, which included a reminder of her friend Linda's address on Victory Boulevard in Woodland Hills and Leslie's sister Betsy's telephone number in Hermosa Beach. That same day, I took fifteen hundred dollars out of the bank in American dollars (enough to get me through a month or more in LA on my own) and booked my flight (with an open return) with an Air Canada agent in the same mall.

One week later, the day after high jumper Carl Georgevski's wedding at Saint Clement's Church and the last time I would ever see Buck Buchanan again, I took a cab out to Pearson airport just after sun up. I went from gray overcast skies when I left that morning in Toronto to an afternoon downpour when I landed at LAX around noon. That famous Los Angeles sunshine was on hold. As we taxied to the Air Canada terminal, I caught a glimpse of the old control tower that looked like a tacky spaceship, yet never failed to excite me. Stepping outside the cabin, I felt the difference of two thousand miles, three time zones and more than twenty degrees Fahrenheit.

There she was. Dressed a pale yellow blouse and powder blue skirt with braided leather sandals, a beaming Tricia Woodbridge was standing there smiling brightly. I could see her long lanky arm wave from a distance. Trish looked very happy to greet me. We began with a rock solid kiss and embrace.

Pressing her face, breasts and hips close to mine, she said, "It's been a year, Peter. Please tell me you've missed me."

8

LOS ANGELES TIMES

The City of Los Angeles still is the second largest metropolis on the continent, although landing at airports shrouded in rain makes most modern cities look the same. This vast mountain basin of desert hills on the Pacific coast only averages a foot or so of annual precipitation with little overcast from November to April, so storms and showers this late in May were fairly uncommon—a symbolic greeting but no grave worries for me. Tricia and I were soon out of the wet inside the parking lot across from terminal one kissing against the side of her car. I felt like having her then and there in the back of her Ford Mustang.

"First of all, Nurse Woodbridge, let me say that it's thrilling to see you again. And second," I told the long tall strawberry blonde, "I love what you've done with your hair."

She'd cut it by ten inches or more since a year ago, but kept a few flyaway ringlets and tangles. I liked Trish a lot because she was very bright, liberal minded and incredibly sexy.

Tricia tossed me the keys to her Mustang II, climbed in on the pilot's side and lifted her hips and legs over the console. That was a treat.

I climbed in, and she said, "I'll navigate, you drive. Just don't be a madman as usual."

The engine was still warm, so we pulled out into airport traffic straight away without warming her up. The brakes were long and the suspension felt slushy and soft. All of the millions of poorly sealed oil

pans dripping on to the roadways made the water bead up and the tires aquaplane on the pavement. Whenever I tried putting the spurs to her lackluster one hundred and five horses, there was no torque in response. Even in the dry, the Ford Mustang II handled about as well as a sofa on coasters.

The rain let up. It was still a windy gray day but warm and nice just the same. Even the ugly parts of LA have palm trees and yuccas enhancing its rows of stucco dwellings. They aren't all glamorous, though many are nicely adorned with red Spanish tile. At night, under the lights, everything in this desert terrain looks entirely different. And, right as night is falling, the lights from behind the bars on people's windows cast shadows like prisons. But, for now, it was easy to ignore any unsightliness. It was noon in LA, and I was focused instead on the pretty girl who was seated next to me.

We sat idle in northbound traffic on Lincoln for half an hour. At least we got to hold hands and catch up on recent events. Trish told me where to turn, and we found a spot to park near her favorite delicatessen—somewhere close to the beach at Santa Monica and Ocean Avenue.

Seated in the booth next to ours were two supersized fellows with thick German accents and necks as swollen as oak trees. Tricia recognized one of the men and whispered to me that he was "Mr. Olympia."

He was apparently a bodybuilder who'd appeared in a couple of movies I'd never heard of—some thirty-year-old aspiring actor.

"His name is Arnold Schwarzenegger," she said in a low tone. "Or something like that."

"Big world, small café," I whispered back, turning my head in another direction.

"Huh? What was that?"

"Nothing," I replied, "just ask Roman Polanski."

"Peter, did you take something on the plane? Are you still high?"

"Wish I had, but no. It's just a bad habit I've picked up," I said, tapping the side of my head.

"You *did* take something. I knew it!" she insisted. "I can get us some grass if you want help calming down? My friend, Joanne, can score us an ounce of some pretty good stuff."

"Thanks babe. Maybe later. But where should we head next? The beach sound good to you? When are you next due to be working?"

"Not 'til tomorrow. Hey, I know...let's take you shopping first."

"The UCLA bookstore!"

So that's where we headed for tube socks, cotton sweats, no-tears

shampoo, razor blades, size 8 Puma trainers, Epsom salts and a medium-soft toothbrush that, in those days, I had to use manually.

Tricia talked about her new job at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, and I was duly impressed. She was just right for the job and deserved to be on her way in a noble profession. I envied her, because I respect nurses a lot. On the personal side, Trish said she was still stinging from a breakup she had told me about over the phone and in one or two letters. No sense dwelling on that. She asked me how I felt about teaching and graduate school. I explained how I had hoped for more but would settle for a teaching assistantship at OISE.

Eventually, as always, I led the discussion around to my interest in Leslie Van Houten. I did that with just about everyone, but with Trish it was something we'd already talked about. She wasn't surprised that was the reason I'd come to LA that summer. She told me she'd been reading about Leslie's new trial in the *Los Angeles Times*, and, since I'd already mentioned that as well as my coming to town over the phone, she kept copies so I could read them when I arrived. I told her how much I appreciated her friendship. That wasn't all. It went deeper than that, but neither of us knew how far to take things. In a sense, I knew instinctively to leave enough space in my heart just for Leslie.

After running errands that day and into the evening, we drove back to the flat on South Sepulveda Boulevard that Trish shared with her roommate Joanne. Our stylish picnic cost each of us no more than a couple of bucks. We cooked up a stir-fry of tofu with chow mein noodles and vegetables drenched in garlic and sesame oil. It was as outstanding to eat as it smelled. The three of us shared two bottles of sparkling rosé and smoked an eighth of pot outside on the balcony while listening to music. Predictably, Tricia and I stayed up late and made out like a couple of wildcats. Somewhere, someone was playing a record by Roxy Music that I've hung on to because of that night "for your pleasure…" And it crossed my mind where Leslie was in all of this. She wasn't entirely unimagined. Sometimes, I would talk to myself as if she was there to hear me.

"We are, after all, passionate, confused and irrational creatures," I mumbled at some point. "Driven by dark forces we don't dare often dream of..."

Sure, I must have been stoned out of my gourd when I said it. Tricia moaned as a way of thankfully cutting me off.

Soon after making love, I recall one of us saying, "It's been a long time for me too."

It hardly mattered which one of us said it first.

"Some things bear repeating."

We didn't sleep in. We couldn't. My watch was still on Toronto time, and Trish had an early shift to get on with. I dropped her off at Cedars after a quick stop for coffee, newspapers, and pastries for breakfast. I kept the car to myself and headed back to the flat to change into the more supple flats I bought the day before in Westwood.

I ran a couple laps around Mar Vista Park as a warm up before finding a payphone to call Leslie's girlfriend, Linda Grippi. No answer at first. Then, I tried making a long-distance call to Toronto. There was no reply there either. I was hoping Jean might have Martin Bijaux's telephone number or street address in LA. But I'd try again later.

After a drive to the beach and sprinting sets of acceleration runs on the sand, I stopped at another payphone at Venice and Tuller, right across from Madame Paulyn's Mystic Temple. This time, I got through to Linda's high school switchboard in Calabasas. We agreed to meet on Wednesday. She said something about my needing to have the sheriff's approval before I could get on Leslie's visitor's list. I was one step closer to being face-to-face with the girl of my faraway dreams.

Wednesday, May 25th. Linda picked me up where I asked her to in front of the Century Wilshire Hotel. She drove an entry-level BMW—not exactly the 630 CSi but what the hell. Sure beat my tiny MG or Trish's gelded Mustang. Cars are important, I reminded myself. They can teach you a lot if you know how to use them. They can also do substantial harm. I knew this from first-hand experience.

Linda Grippi was the first in a gauntlet of gatekeepers who kept watch over Leslie. She was about my age—twenty-six or twenty-seven tops. I could see she was protective of Leslie and wary of me. But who wouldn't be? I thought it a sensible stance for her to take under the circumstances. We drove east along Highway 10 to near where it intersects with the 710.

The Sybil Brand Institute served as the Los Angeles County Jail for women. Inmates from the California Institution for Women sixty miles away in Frontera were housed here whenever summoned to appear in superior court, as was the case for Leslie. From a distance, I thought the site resembled Bergen-Belsen without all the smokestacks. Closer up it looked more like a large high school fortress, given the way it sat on top of the hill where City Terrace Drive turns into Sheriff Road.

Linda and I sat parked in the car talking until it was time to line up with the others. She explained how the earliest I could get in to see

Leslie might be the next day, on Thursday. But, first, I had to fill out a battery of forms, have my picture and fingerprints taken, and promise to abide by the rules—of which there were many.

Before turning and walking in the opposite direction for her own visit with Leslie that day, Linda said she would tell Les I was there and that I'd be back tomorrow. Then, a male deputy took me into a sparsely-kept room to be captured on film shot with a cheap Polaroid camera. No wonder the pictures all turned out so terribly wrong no matter how many he took. So I had to show everyone my passport photo again and again as I passed from station to station. Meanwhile, Linda and Leslie had an additional twenty minutes to chat while I waited out by the car taking notes in my diary.

On the way back to the Century Wilshire, Linda and I talked some more about Leslie.

"Do you mind if I ask you something, Peter? What are you expecting to get out of this?"

The way she asked wasn't harsh, but she was very direct. That put me off-balance.

Feeling nervous I said something trite like, "I jus' wanna show my support. I'm expecting to meet Leslie. No more than that."

There was a lot more to it than that—more than I could say—but already I could see her eyes glossing over.

"How do you see this whole Charlie Manson business, if you don't mind me asking?"

"I think the whole 'Helter Skelter' myth was a scam invented for reasons of Manson's own sacred devotions. Leslie was almost as much a victim as were the LaBiancas," I said, bumping into myself coming and going.

"Well, I've never heard it put quite like that before," Linda said.

It wasn't a put-down, but I took it that way regardless. Sounding quite scattered and all over the place, I continued.

"From what I've read, Manson wanted to be a big rock star. There's little distinction in that. He might've been a master manipulator, but magical mystery mastermind he's not. Sadly, he won't be the last false prophet to herald the Apocalypse in times to come…"

Yes it's true, I was an incoherent, nervous wreck who liked to hear himself talk. A bad combination.

"And what about Leslie?" she asked me.

"Like I said...it wasn't just the people he had killed whose lives Manson ruined. And despite all she's been through...I'm sure you feel the same way...I think Leslie is one of the most sincere and honest people I've ever gotten to know, even if only through letter writing."

Linda said nothing, but nodded.

"What do I expect?" I continued, "I guess I expect I'll get to know Leslie and her friends, like you, better. That's all. I want to continue to support her as much as I can."

If I tried to tell her the truth about my expectations, she might have tried to keep me at a distance from Leslie—at least the thought occurred to me.

"Yes, well...I know she's been looking forward to meeting you too," Linda said.

"You've known Leslie since school and during the time when all of this happened. Does she seem much different to you now than before?" I asked. "I'm sorry, Linda, I know this is none of my business."

"I can tell you this much...she wasn't her true self at the time this whole Manson business started and for a long time after she'd been to prison. But she's back with us now. It took her years of hard work to find her way...that's how far she had gone. It took *years* for her to reemerge."

Pulling her car up in front of the hotel, Linda and I had a minute more to discuss arrangements concerning my visits to superior court.

"What's going on at the moment?" I asked.

"Last week Dr. Ditman, a psychiatrist Max called to testify in Leslie's defense, said the combined effect of LSD and cult beliefs were prime factors in what happened. Leslie really believed Manson *was* Jesus Christ. You know? Ditman also said how incredibly strong and healthy Leslie is now. You can see for yourself tomorrow."

That evening, Tricia traded another nurse at her work for a shift later the next day on Thursday. We wandered near the beach in Santa Monica and found a nice outdoor place where we sat drinking wine while sharing a pot full of steamed mussels. After a second bottle of wine, we went for a walk in the surf, and I still recall how good it felt to be getting my feet wet. At some point, Trish and I talked about my going out with Linda again the next day to meet Leslie in person.

When we got back to her flat, I used Tricia's phone to try calling Jean again for Martin's number. Still no luck. But I did manage to get Linda at home, and we arranged to meet again the next day at the same spot in front of the Century Wilshire.

"Who was that on the phone?" Tricia asked, carrying in clean clothes from the laundry.

"Leslie's friend, Linda," I said.

"Okay, tell me about it."

Trish was a fair-minded person and genuinely supportive of Leslie, having listened to me rant for so long and reading about the new trial in the *Los Angeles Times*.

She said, "I give her credit for owning up to the truth about what she did and not acting crazy like last time. I hope she gets out."

Picking the *Times* up off the floor, I said, "One of the things I most admire is her not pretending she's guiltless. She's being honest about what really went down, and all she's asking for is a chance to prove herself. The trouble is, the system is a rats' nest of liars on both sides of the bars."

"Nonsense," Tricia said. "Although I'm confused by what it says in there, Judge Hinz (was it?) ordered certain testimony be given without the jury present to hear it. What's that all about? What am I missing? Or have I got it backwards?"

I gave her my weak summary of what Bill Farr had to say in a series of columns that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* in May 1977 ("**Miss Van Houten Tells Role in Slaying**," May 13, "**LSD Influence on Miss Van Houten Told**," May 20, and "**Miss Van Houten Believed Only Duty Was to Manson, Expert Says**," May 25). Farr reported the reason Maxwell Keith called Leslie to re-testify about what she told the court at her first trial was in an effort to block district attorney Stephen Kay from using the false testimony she gave in the previous trial against her. In 1971, during the penalty phase, Leslie told the jury she planned the whole thing herself. She said she intended to massacre innocent people, including Gary Hinman. Of course, she was only saying what Manson ordered her to say—that he and Watson had nothing to do with the murders. If she'd turned the others in, she might have walked away with immunity.

Judge Edward A. Hinz, Jr. rejected Maxwell Keith's contention that Leslie's prior statement not be read to this jury. Instead, the judge ruled the prosecution could proceed to read the entirety of Leslie's earlier testimony from the trial almost eight years before. It was as if time had stood still. It only looks like the truth, only it isn't. So how much of the truth did the court really know about what happened in August 1969 in the dead of night in the City of Angels?

* * *

After driving from Big Sur to San Diego on August 6th, 1969, less than three days before the Tate and LaBianca slayings, Charles Manson took his new teenage conscript Stephanie Schram home to pick up

some clothes from her sister's. They'd dropped LSD together, and Charlie went through his tried and true sex and "surrender your ego to love" routine. Soon, she was under Manson's trance like so many before her.

While Ms. Schram packed her things, Manson played The Beatles *White Album* over and over. He warned Stephanie's sister, also a big Beatles fan, that John, Paul, Ringo and George were the four angels prophesized about in the book of Revelation. He intimated they were writing their songs as coded messages to him *personally*. Manson (aka the "fifth Beatle") explained how the message he got from the song "Helter Skelter" announced that the black race was about to overthrow the white wealthy classes in a bloody and violent Armageddon. It was comin' down fast. "Can you hear it...can you hear it…?" *Yes she is…*

"People are going to be slaughtered," Charlie told the sisters. "They'll be lying on their lawns dead."

Just a few days later, Manson's presage proved true. Even if it wasn't what The Beatles had in mind when they wrote that album of songs from separate rooms at the Maharishi's Ashram near Rishikesh.

"Helter Skelter" is in fact a deliberately discordant parade of electronic-musical overkill the band recorded back in London at the Abbey Road studios. Its composers have said it was meant as a send-up of the sexually charged guitar riffs of Pete Townsend and Jimi Hendrix. The lyrics have to do with having an erotic tour of a woman's body from top to bottom—not exactly a war to end all wars. So where did Manson get the message it was all about his pet peeve and primary source of paranoia?

After the shooting of Bernard Crowe and the killing of Gary Hinman, many of Manson's closest confidants, men like Tex Watson and Bruce Davis, were becoming as paranoid as he was. It was contagious. Especially Tex, whose frenzy was being constantly fueled by a stash of methamphetamines that he and Susan Atkins kept hidden.

On potent psychedelic drugs like LSD, what's going on inside a person gets smudged with what's on the outside. So after Manson had sold everyone on his warped construal of "Helter Skelter," Family members like Tex armed themselves with more guns, knives and favors to bikers for drugs and the girls. They needed protection from the soon to be rampaging black militant armies Charlie imagined. There was also a supply of ammunition that Spahn Ranch weapons master Danny DeCarlo kept in his shabby quarters. However menacing Vincent Bugliosi liked to make this preparation for war sound, in

reality it was little more than a dangerous, hideous play-act that Manson had taken too far out of ireful vengeance and criminal convenience.

* * *

Shortly after 9:15 a.m. on Saturday, August 9th, the Polanski's housekeeper Winifred Chapman accompanied West LAPD officers on to the property at 10050 Cielo Drive in Benedict Canyon to see what a bloodbath of horrors she'd discovered that morning.

Although police didn't yet know any of the victims' identities, the first body they found was that of a red-haired high school kid from El Monte, Steven Parent. Steven was slumped over the front seat of his Rambler sedan. His plaid shirt and blue jeans were sodden with blood. Young Mr. Parent had been slashed in the arm and shot four times at close range in the face and head with a small caliber revolver. He bled to death in his car.

The officers slowly proceeded past the black Porsche parked beside the garage. No sign of any activity there. Then, they spotted two more bodies sprawled out on the lawn in front of the ranch house. Cautious the killer or killers might still be lurking around, Mrs. Chapman was kept back while police searched the rest of the premises. Out by the guesthouse, officers heard dogs barking and someone yelling for them to stop. They kicked in the door and immediately handcuffed and arrested the lone occupant, who turned out to be a friend the dead boy they found in his car. Police dragged the young caretaker, William Garretson, out to look at the bodies. It wasn't until later that police figured out he had nothing to do with the murders.

After a thorough search of the buildings and automobiles, the officers went back to the front of the house to have a closer look at the body of Roman Polanski's friend from Poland, 'Voytek' Frykowski. As police came nearer the corpse, they could see from his torn, swollen face and head just how brutally he had been bludgeoned to death. Mr. Frykowski was found on his side, with one hand clutching blades of grass in his palm. Fifty-one stab wounds and gashes had punctured his body and limbs. He had also been shot twice with a revolver and clobbered over the head with a blunt object more than a dozen times. Hard.

Also on the lawn underneath a fir tree in front of the gleaming blue pool laid the remains of coffee fortune heiress and Radcliffe grad, Abigail Folger. Ms. Folger had been just twenty-five years old when she bled to death from twenty-eight stab wounds. Both she and her

boyfriend, Voytek, were later found to have psychedelic-entactogenic drugs (THC and MDA) in their bloodstreams. Just enough to make them acutely aware and hypersensitive to the terror of those final moments before drowning in pools of lasting unconsciousness.

One of the officers was standing beside the porch when he noticed the word “PIG” smeared in blood on the front door. Inside the house near the fireplace on the far side of a bloodstained couch lay the vanquished bodies of another man and a pregnant young woman. Vast splashes and smears of gore were on all the walls and floors. A nylon rope was slung over the rafters above them, tied at each end around the necks of the victims.

Jay Sebring had been shot once and stabbed no less than seven times. The gunshot alone, as well as each of three stab wounds, would have in and of themselves been enough to end his life. Mr. Sebring, like the others, died of exsanguination. His heart pumped out all of his blood. Four feet away at the other end of the rope lay the remains of a blonde and strikingly beautiful Hollywood actress. Someone had draped a bloodstained American flag over the sofa beside where she laid in a fetal position.

Sharon Tate Polanski had been eight-months pregnant at the time of her death. She died of hemorrhaging from sixteen stab wounds, some of which penetrated deeply into her lungs and heart. Five wounds were in and of themselves lethal. She was wearing a colorfully patterned bikini, now soaked with the last of her blood. In death, at last, actress Sharon Tate was about to reach true celebrity status. That’s how awful this world had become.

The next morning, the mood at Spahn Ranch was perversely ecstatic. Each of the last night’s marauders, Charles ‘Tex’ Watson, Susan ‘Sadie’ Atkins, Patricia ‘Katie’ Krenwinkel and Linda Kasabian, stopped by the trailer next to George Spahn’s house to watch the breaking news on TV. Hearing the victims’ identities revealed for the first time, Tex got excited and ran to let Charlie know. Manson had already gone back to Cielo Drive to see for himself what havoc he’d caused.

Watson was quoted as telling the others, “The Soul really picked a good one this time.”

Up until then, Tex didn’t even know who it was he had killed. Still, he was proud that he’d practically, singlehandedly, knocked off a famous heiress, a celebrity stylist and a Hollywood actress all in one go. Manson should be pleased about that. Only he wasn’t—not entirely.

It was great news to Manson that he’d instigated something so horrendously gruesome he had the whole world asking, “Who could

have done such a thing?"

It's what Manson *didn't* hear that galled him. He expected to hear that police detectives suspected black militants were involved in these murders—murders that were apparently linked to Gary Hinman's slaying two weeks before. Though he thought the similarities would appear obvious to the police and the press, there was no mention of the Black Panthers or the connection to Hinman. Charlie would just have to try harder next time. Manson promised to command the next assault in person and vowed to go out again that very night.

Leslie said she found out later that afternoon from Patricia Krenwinkel what had happened early Saturday morning. She did say she didn't want to kill anyone but believed it *had* to be done. Manson convinced her that what happened in Benedict Canyon was the first epic battle in the revolution he dubbed "Helter Skelter." Indeed, the press, radio, and TV broadcasts appeared to confirm it. One had to wonder what Terry Melcher and Dennis Wilson thought about all of these goings on.

As crazy as all of that seemed to her now, Leslie admitted how, back then (in 1969 to 1971), she was willing to sacrifice herself for Manson's championed cause. Manson's illusions of grandeur infected them all to such a degree that they would murder for him if he wanted it done, even if that meant the gas chamber if and when they were caught.

* * *

Around sundown on Saturday, August 9th 1969 at Spahn Ranch in Chatsworth, Charles Manson told past masters from the previous night —Charles Watson, Susan Atkins, Patricia Krenwinkel and Linda Kasabian, plus rookies Steve Grogan and Leslie Van Houten—to bring a dark change of clothing and meet him back at the bunkhouse.

Charlie's agenda was to divide the group into two separate assault teams. Each, he said, would take a different house and not leave any witnesses. Leslie knew there would be killing and that she, herself, might have to die. But she was anxious to prove her loyalty to Manson, and nothing else mattered. That's why she got into the car. What she didn't know yet, however, was what her role would be or how far she would have to go to do everything Charlie told her.

During his briefing with Watson, who had spent two days in a row dropping acid and snorting meth as a chaser, Manson complained about the chaos, panic and noise of the midnight before. Tex insisted the problem was that Charlie hadn't outfitted him properly weapons-

wise to kill so many people.

Manson insisted, “That wasn’t the problem. Last night was too messy. This time, I’m going to show you how to do it.”

Charlie and Tex armed themselves with a gun and a military bayonet. None of the girls were issued weapons at first.

After getting lost a couple of times and aborting three or more random attempts, Manson became very deliberate in his directions. Somewhere near Griffith Park and the Golden State Freeway, he told Linda Kasabian to stop the old borrowed Ford in front of a house she immediately recognized. Of those in the car, Linda, Pat and Charlie had been to this place at least once before.

Some months earlier, they’d been to a peyote party in the house next door to where they were parked. After that party, Manson and some of the others went on a “creepy crawl” tour through Harold’s neighbors’ houses. Sneaking in and moving items around while the occupants were sleeping—just for kicks, petty theft or perhaps even reconnaissance training. There’s no way of telling for sure all that Manson may have been up to.

Linda Kasabian asked Charlie, “You’re not going to do that house, are you?”

To which Manson replied, “No, the one next door.”

Same as the night before, he chose the house at 3301 Waverly Drive primarily because he knew the layout. Armed with a gun and a sabre, Manson disappeared into a stand of trees between the two houses while the others remained in the car. When he came back, he told Tex to come with him, and they vanished back into the darkness.

The backdoor was unlocked, and, once inside, Manson waved his handgun while Tex held the point of his bayonet close to Leno LaBianca, who had been sleeping alone on the living room sofa.

“Who are you? What do you want?” asked the stunned and frightened business exec in his pajamas.

Mr. LaBianca stood up from where he had been reading the racing forms and newspaper accounts of the killings in Benedict Canyon. Manson told him to sit back down and be quiet. Nobody was going to be hurt if he did what he was told. Holding the heavyset man at gunpoint, he ordered him to roll over on to his stomach while Tex Watson secured him with the leather thongs they brought for that purpose. Manson asked if anyone else was in the house.

“My wife is upstairs in the bedroom.”

Tex found Rosemary LaBianca seated in bed in her nightgown and ordered the terrified woman downstairs to the living room at the end of a knife. Then, he bound the couple together back-to-back by their

wrists and ankles while Manson held them at gunpoint.

"We'll give you anything. We won't call the police," Rosemary LaBianca assured them.

Watson told her to shut the fuck up. Acting out his own twisted version of the good cop-bad cop routine, Manson kept assuring the LaBiancas that if they remained calm, and did exactly what they were told, no harm would come to either of them.

"This is only a robbery," is what he said, coolly.

He took their wallets and returned to the street to call Pat and Leslie out of the car.

Manson told the girls to take their changes of clothes with them and do whatever Watson ordered.

"Follow Tex's commands," Charlie repeated.

As always, the men were completely in charge. He told Pat not to cause fear or panic like had happened the previous night.

"Don't let them know you are going to kill them."

And he said to be sure and leave the scene looking witchy and shocking.

"Paint a picture more gruesome than anybody has ever seen."

Once they were finished with their rampage, the gang was told to hitchhike back to the ranch where Charlie would meet them.

Watson had his weapons and knew what to do. All Leslie could think about was not letting down Charlie. Before leaving the house, Manson instructed the girls to pull down the blinds in the kitchen and bring back a couple of steak knives.

Then, he whispered to Tex, "Make *sure* everybody does something to get her hands dirty."

Krenwinkel returned with an eight-inch serrated knife and a ten-inch tined carving fork. Leslie can't remember that part.

Then, Manson drove off with his veteran troupers Kasabian, Atkins and, novice, Steve Grogan. Presumably, they would go on in search of further victims. Manson's one other attempt at murder that night never came off. Later on in the evening, he had Linda Kasabian plant Rosemary LaBianca's wallet inside a gas station washroom near the black neighborhood district of Watts. Then, Charlie headed back to Spahn Ranch to hear Tex Watson's report.

Tex pulled a pillowcase over Leno LaBianca's head and tied it with a lamp cord he used to gag the man with. Leno's hands were still tied behind him. Watson then jostled Rosemary LaBianca back to the bedroom and pulled a pillowcase over her head the same way he had

done with her husband. Tex told Leslie and Pat to keep her there pinned to the bed. Leslie couldn't remember if Katie handed her a knife or not, because she needed both of her hands to hold the woman down. Only she couldn't. Rosemary was strong and struggled with both of the girls once Tex left them alone.

Fueled on speed and bloodlust for a second night in a row, Tex returned to the living room where his captive lay on the couch, hands bound and defenseless. Mr. LaBianca must have sensed what horrors were coming. Pushing him flat on his back, Watson ripped open the man's pajamas and began plunging his bayonet as hard as he could into his body.

LaBianca's last words were, "I'm dead, I'm dead."

Only he wasn't, not yet, even though Watson thought so.

Hearing the horrible, blood-curdling shrieks of her husband drowning in his own blood, Rosemary LaBianca began struggling harder.

The terrified woman demanded to know, "*What are you doing to my husband?*"

Despite Leslie and Pat's attempts to restrain her, Mrs. LaBianca broke free and began swinging the table lamp at her assailants. Pat had her knife out. During this scuffle, Krenwinkel tried repeatedly to stab at the woman, only the knife struck a bone in her shoulder and the handle broke off in her hand. Pat shouted for Tex to come help. Leslie let go of Mrs. LaBianca and fled from the room, standing frozen in shock on the threshold staring into an empty hall.

Still frenzied and soaked with amphetamines, Watson's attack on Mrs. LaBianca was so ferocious that each of seven wounds he inflicted penetrated deep enough to have ended her life on their own. Leslie has no memory of watching Mrs. LaBianca dying. All she remembers when she finally looked into the LaBiancas' bedroom again was that she was dead and no longer moving. The ultimate shock.

Tex could see that Leslie had been hesitant to take part in the carnage. Pat said she was afraid that what Tex had done to the others he might do to them also. He was still high and deranged and focused on only one thing: Manson's directive not to leave any witnesses. And remembering that Charlie told him to "Make sure everyone gets their hands dirty," Watson grabbed hold of Leslie by the arm, spun her around, put his knife in her hand and screamed at the top of his lungs for her to "*Do something!*"

Leslie recalled seeing Mrs. LaBianca's dead body lying face down on the floor. With Tex standing over her, Leslie took the knife and began stabbing the woman's lifeless body more than a dozen times in

the buttocks. Tex later said he didn't believe Leslie showed enough craze and fury. It was estimated from the autopsy examination of Rosemary LaBianca that, of the total of forty-one gashes inflicted, approximately sixteen were shallow post mortem wounds to her lower back and buttocks.

When it was obvious that Mrs. LaBianca was dead, Patricia Krenwinkel had already returned to the living room where she discovered that Mr. LaBianca was still alive, if only just barely. Once again, she alerted Tex Watson.

Leno LaBianca would have undoubtedly bled out in a matter of minutes. But, just to be certain, Watson stabbed his body some more, after which he or Pat carved the word "WAR" on his abdomen. Krenwinkel testified to sticking the long-tined fork into Mr. LaBianca's stomach and just leaving it there, watching it wobble. LaBianca was found with a small kitchen knife left lodged in his throat.

Still upstairs and stricken with shock, Leslie wiped everything down, including the insides of drawers and things none of them had come close to touching. Although there was plenty of loot in the way of expensive cameras, gold, diamond rings and pricey guns to be had, the gang took nothing more than a bag full of coins and the wallets Manson took with him when he split for the projects—brave soul that he was. Clearly, robbery was not their motive.

Patricia Krenwinkel misspelled the phrase "HEALTER SKELTER" when she wrote it in Leno LaBianca's blood on the refrigerator door. Katie had heard The Beatles sing "Helter Skelter" on a record over and over but had never actually seen the words written out. They also wrote "Death To Pigs" and "RISE" in blood on the living room wall alongside the framed family photos.

Covered in his victims' blood after the massacre, Tex Watson took a shower before changing into the clean shirt he was told to bring with him. Leslie had no blood on her whatsoever, so Tex told her to give him the clean jeans she had on. Leslie took off her pants and gave them to Watson. She found a pair of Mrs. LaBianca's shorts to change into.

Before leaving the house, this trio of Manson cult zombies looted the refrigerator for snacks and left watermelon rinds in the sink. After feeding the LaBianca's dogs, the intruders left the house, throwing their bloody clothes in distant neighborhood trash bins as they made their way to the Golden State Freeway. From there, they hitched a few rides back to Spahn Ranch and got there ahead of Manson. The last guy to give them a lift came back to the ranch a few times after that asking for Leslie. She always hid when she saw him coming.

* * *

Tricia knew the most basic facts if not many details. But she listened as I did my best to fill in the blanks. She had an intuitive sense of what counted for fairness and social justice. Trish reminded me of how some of the things concerning Leslie Van Houten we'd talked about many times before now—particularly the drugs, sex and mind control.

"Look, Peter. No one likes to be the least preferred choice. I'm not blind or stupid, and I think I can see what's going on here. I can see Van Houten's become important to you, so you do what you have to. Don't worry 'bout me. Maybe once you meet her in person, she might not match up to your infatuations."

"That sounds like some country-western hurtin' music to me," I said. "Still what you say is fair."

Tricia smiled, gave me a kiss on the cheek then offered to drop me off at the Century Wilshire and pick me up later. She had errands of her own to rush off to.

I could see Linda Grippi's BMW parked beside the hotel when we got there, so I reached for the handle just as Trish pulled the car over.

"Catch you later," Tricia said, holding me back an instant longer.

I gave her one last kiss on the lips and got out of the car.

Outside the bright summer sunlight was shining again, but my interior barometer was in free fall. Suddenly, I felt strangely nervous like a schoolboy—an odd allusion to occur right at that moment, I thought.

Linda drove the same route as before. Heading east on the Santa Monica Freeway, she mentioned having recently spoken to Leslie over the phone.

"She's excited to see you," Linda said.

"What a coincidence," I kidded. "Sorry, I don't mean to be smug."

I was nervous, excited, undone.

Linda handled our getting through all the county jail rigmarole like an old pro. She knew the ropes, and I skipped along right behind her. There were rules posted every which way you looked—lists of "Visiting Instructions" printed on black, blue and red plastic panels drilled to the walls and wired to fences. Armed guards sat in glass and steel cages where we had to "Wait Behind the Green Line" for our passes.

Once inside, I could hear distant bells going off like they do in most high schools. The place smelled like a rare combination of disinfectant and industrial-strength vomit. I could see visitors in the

queue ahead of us perched on hard wooden-top stools. Inmates and their guests had to talk through bulletproof glass over institutionally monitored phone sets, and there was this constant, ghostly din of intercom voices echoing down the halls. The atmosphere wasn't inviting.

Then, I saw Leslie.

I remember the exact moment in time. What figured most was her great big miraculous smile, which I could see at fifty paces. She was lining up like a kid at the head of the class waiting for recess. She had on a tattered-knit navy blue sweater that hung at odds on her mighty thin shoulders. Underneath that, she wore a dreary gray dress made of sack linen cloth. Yet, even in such a cheerless outfit, she stood alone looking sunny and willowy among all the apes and orangutans that surrounded her.

Leslie gave a wave and another smile before she sat down and began talking to Linda. Watching me taking irregular glances at what she had on, she pinched the fabric of her dress and mouthed the words, "Don't you like it? It isn't Parisian, but it's the best that we've got."

I beamed at her natural beauty. I distinctly remember thinking Leslie didn't look like any of the pictures of her that I'd seen or imagined. Well…whoever does? She was far prettier and pleasingly brighter in person. Even if her skin looked a bit pasty—gods only know what they fed her—her hair was a sleek mocha brown. I liked the way she looked through those warm, unabashed hazelnut eyes of hers. I thought she was sexy and funny right from the start.

As Leslie and Linda continued to talk, I leaned back and tried not to stare. They both seemed to be having a laugh on me every once in a while. After a few minutes more, Leslie unfolded her arms and motioned for me to come closer.

I scooted onto the edge of the stool next to Linda and asked them both, "What is so funny, you two?"

That's when Linda passed me the handset.

Leslie said, "My mother is going to be so surprised. My sister Betsy too. They were sure the pictures you sent were of somebody else. Bets thought you probably got a friend to pose and sent those instead of yourself."

"Instead of—instead of *myself*? How is that done? No such luck, I'm afraid. I yam what I yam…"

Dumb joke I supposed. I could feel that weatherglass rising again. Why was I acting so nervous? At the same time something noteworthy kicked in. We found ourselves involuntarily starting to talk at once.

This happened more than a few times. It's not something one would normally find so enticing, yet there it was. I imagined gathering her up in my arms and carrying her off somewhere alone until she begged for mercy twice. Isn't that awful? Still, that's how I felt.

Twenty minutes was too short a time. It seemed we had so much more we needed to cover. But just that short interval of intersubjective, secondary reflection on this first occasion was enough to change the way we wrote our letters from then on. As both of us would write each other later, we knew we'd stumbled into some new phase or dimension together right from the start. One look was all it took.

"Linda can bring you along to the courthouse right away if you want," Leslie said, "I'd like you to catch a glimpse of that scene. How long will you stay in California?"

"A month if my friends let me sleep on their couch. I have to get back to Toronto for graduate school."

"Tor-ron-*toe*. Like at the end of your foot. Is that how you say it?"

"Some people who live there make it sound more like *Ta-ronna*," I said.

"Got someone back home in Toronto to water your houseplants?"

"I put them outside and left their fate...like my own...to the gods for the rest of the summer. They know what they're doing, I don't."

"Know what, Peter? Before I forget...just want to say...I just got the letter where you copied the poems by Mark Strand. *Really* neat poems. I liked 'The Room' a lot. You knew that I would, which is why you sent them, right? I love that poem."

"I told you I met him once...at Ohio U in Athens, when I was a freshman. He came to read from his latest book at the time, *Darker*. I've kept the copy he signed on the page of his 'New Poetry Handbook,' where he advises against overpraising the poem of another. So he might 'have a beautiful mistress'..."

"Oh, so you're looking for a beautiful mistress, huh? I guess that rules me out."

"That's funny, Leslie," I said, smiling so deeply I caught my own reflection under the surface of both of her eyes.

Much brighter, I thought, than when just tossing my hair in a mirror. So much so, that I forgot to finish the line about the poet driving his mistress away.

"I'll talk to Max about you coming in with him one of these evenings," she said. "That way, we can talk in a conference room instead of through this weird, smudgy window."

"Maybe get to hold hands?" I suggested, planting thoughts in both

our minds. Leslie drew a big smile and maybe her face slightly flushed. Just as I'd started to hand the phone back to Linda, Leslie signaled me back on the line.

"Will you come visit again?"

I said that I would.

And she said, "How 'bout tomorrow?"

9

CUL-DE-SAC

The next day, Linda Grippi picked me up, and we went downtown in the afternoon. From the outside, the LA County Superior Court on West Temple Street looked to me like the establishing shot for a popular TV show at the time, “Quincy, M.E.” Inside, the courtroom looked the same as you see in the movies, with high ceilings and wood paneled walls. Banks of filing cabinets flanked the bailiffs. Judge Hinz’s executive perch was just below the great seal of the state of California, and the rest of us were resigned to a lower tier of hard wooden benches. The overriding feeling it gave me was of a most profound wasteland.

In contrast to all the chatter going on inside my head at that moment, suddenly the room went deathly quiet. The court bailiff told us to rise and remain standing until the man in the black robes had sat down. I tried not to stare at Leslie the whole time but couldn’t help it. Whenever she turned to look my way, I couldn’t help but give myself away smiling. Other than Leslie, the most interesting person in the room wasn’t the judge or the deputy DA. It was her attorney.

Maxwell Stanley Keith interrupted his education to serve in World War II as a bombardier. After graduation from Princeton, he returned home to California to attend the Loyola Law School in Los Angeles. Now in his mid-forties, Max had mostly wispy white hair. His eyes were set wide apart, and he had sizeable ears that always seemed primed on alert like a kitten’s. That day in court, Max wore a dark navy Brooks Brothers suit with his tie knotted loosely. He looked a lot

taller than I was—over six feet. And, even though he would frequently glance at his notes as he stood at the podium, I thought he did this mostly for effect. He argued in such an extemporaneous way it seemed to me he was composing off the cuff. I hoped and imagined the jury liked him as much as I did.

Linda Grippi told me how, only a few days before—the day I flew in from Toronto in fact—Maxwell Keith argued that Leslie Van Houten was suffering from a severe and debilitating mental impairment at the time of the LaBianca murders. This was called *folie a famille*, family madness. Harvard psychiatrist, Lester Grinspoon was just one of several psychiatrists Keith planned to call to the stand in defense of these claims. Dr. Grinspoon testified that, in his opinion, Leslie was incapable of "meaningfully premeditating" murder at the time the couple was killed. This line of defense was consistent with what Max had argued during the first trial.

* * *

Back in 1971, when he had to sub for Leslie's lawyer, Ron Hughes, Keith asked the court to declare a mistrial. This motion was based on the fact of his not having been present to hear each of the previous witnesses testify. Therefore, he could not properly assess their credibility. Plus, he hadn't been granted adequate time to absorb the more than 18,000 pages of court documents he had to review.

The judge at the first trial, Charles H. Older, denied Keith's request. In fact, Leslie herself was against Max making the appeal—even though it was in her own best interest. That's how completely she was under a spell. Regardless, Max carried on to present a defense that eventually parted Leslie's welfare from Mr. Manson's. His contention was that Leslie and other young women in the cult had been effectively brainwashed by a professionally certified con man. The girls were therefore incapable of thinking or acting on their own volition.

In his closing argument in the previous trial, Keith pointed out how even Vincent Bugliosi repeatedly referred to Leslie and other members as "robots." Then, other times when it suited the prosecutor, they were "free-willed individuals"—a bald-headed flaw that he should have been called on severely.

Keith further argued, "If you believe the prosecution theory that these female defendants were extensions of Mr. Manson and you believe that they were mindless robots, then they cannot be guilty of premeditated murder."

Afterwards, Bugliosi admitted that Maxwell Keith "delivered the best of the four defense arguments." But to no avail with that judge and jury. Leslie, along with all the other defendants, was given the maximum penalty: death in the San Quentin gas chamber. But when the state legislature temporarily abolished capital punishment a year later in 1972, their sentences were reduced to life in prison *with* the possibility of parole after seven years. The average incarceration in the state for first-degree murder was then ten and a half to eleven years. Certainly more if the sufferers were strangers and in cases where there was deliberate mutilation of victims' bodies.

* * *

I spent every day that week in court and heard University of Wisconsin Professor and Psychiatrist, Leigh Roberts, use the term "folie a ménage" to describe the state of cult paranoia of those indoctrinated into the Manson cult.

Max Keith asked Dr. Roberts whether or not Leslie was able to "premeditate or deliberate the murder of another human being?"

The witness answered that, due to her mental illness at the time of the murders, Leslie did not have that capacity.

Roberts went on to say, "She was in a paranoid state...as opposed to being a paranoid person...during the time of the LaBianca slayings."

"Folie a ménage," or "household madness" is another term used to describe this temporary state of group madness where fanatics impart the same delusions to one another, therefore fueling each other's beliefs even further. Because staunchly held convictions such as, "Charlie is really Jesus Christ" were so doggedly held, the cult's delusions were impossible to reason away. Even someone as smart as Leslie Van Houten (and lots of other ordinary people) was at risk to these episodic, paranoid states of being. The drugs helped Manson to mimic and intensify these conditions through various means of practiced mind control.

Former Manson Family recruiter, Paul Watkins, once told documentary filmmaker Robert Hendrickson that after living with Manson for a couple of years he "became Charlie…there was nothing left of *me* anymore. And the people in the Family, there's nothing left of them anymore. They're all Charlie too."

Watkins testified as to how Manson intimated that he was the second coming of Christ—an infinitely perfect person. Charlie preached there was no such thing as right or wrong wherever he was concerned. For backup, he quoted no less authority than the Bible's

book of Revelations and The Beatles “Revolution.” His disciples were thoroughly brainwashed into believing they could do no wrong—so long as they followed Charlie’s misshapen tenets of love and death as if they were according to scripture.

All four psychiatrists who had taken the stand in Leslie’s defense so far in this second trial—Keith Ditman, Lester Grinspoon, Leigh Roberts and Joel Hochman—told the court the same thing. Leslie Van Houten was incapable of premeditation or of willfully taking the life of another human being with malice. Whatever crime she might have been guilty of, it could not be first-degree murder.

Leslie and Max both told me they thought they were getting somewhere with more than half of the six man - six woman jury. Max still had a long list of experts to call. However, sensing the defense’s momentum, Prosecutor Stephen Kay objected to any more psychiatric testimony. Mr. Kay asked the judge to cut the defense’s psychiatric witness testimony short, arguing that it could have the effect of “brainwashing the jury.” Mr. Keith naturally opposed the request, begging Judge Hinz not to grant the prosecution’s motion. Leslie remained calm, but Linda and I were beginning to shiver.

Judge Hinz wasted no time in granting the prosecution’s motion, and, to make matters worse, he ruled against the defense presenting Charles Manson’s psychiatric records as evidence of his malevolent mind control tactics. The judge ruled that however Charles Manson acquired these methods and used them to abolish the self-control of his followers, would not be heard in this context. There were a few gasps in the courtroom. I wasn’t the only one who couldn’t believe it. It seemed as though someone had put the fix in. Whatever Leslie Van Houten had going for her it certainly wasn’t good luck and party-political connections.

That evening Linda drove me out to Sybil Brand. That’s when I got to meet Maxwell Keith for the first time at the end of a handshake. After too short a visit with Les, Max took Linda and me out to a steakhouse near Fair Oaks and Hope Street in Pasadena. We didn’t stay late. Max said he had work to prepare before court in the morning. Leslie was scheduled to take the stand. The main purpose of this little get-together at the restaurant that evening was to give Max Keith and me the opportunity to size each other up—at least that’s what Linda thought when I asked her.

The next morning, Tricia gave me a ride downtown to the Security Pacific Plaza on South Hope Street and dropped me off. As I stepped into his office on the 28th floor, Max’s receptionist informed me he’d already left for superior court. There was also a message for me from

Leslie: “Can you come this evening with Max? Can’t wait to see you!”

Right after court, Max drove us out to Sybil Brand in his black Scirocco. I thought the bombardier handled the car okay for an old guy. It turned out to be a simple drill for getting me in with him when we got there.

Max said, “We’ll tell them you’re a ‘legal runner’ for my firm.”

“What does that mean?”

“Nothing. It means you have a right to be in there. You carry my briefcase.”

That evening, while Max read over transcripts and took notes, Les and I got to hold hands under the table in such a way that the deputies couldn’t see us.

“Does this feel like falling in love to you?” she whispered so no one could hear us.

“If love is like a beautiful girl that smiles the way you do, then the answer is ‘Yes, I believe it does.’

“Les, do you know the fifties film, *The Bad and the Beautiful*?” She shook her head ‘no.’ “Kirk Douglas’ character tells Lana Turner, ‘Love is for the very young’.”

Leslie frowned, then smiled again right away.

“That can’t be all there is to it,” she said, in a tone of mock protest.

“No,” I said, “it gets better. Later on in the film, a cynical but *fatally* attractive Lila, played by a sultry Elaine Stewart…who reminds me of you by the way...”

“Me! I’m not *sul*-try, am I?”

“Very,” said I. “Lila reminds everyone, ‘Love is for the birds’.”

Leslie laughed, but said nothing more for the moment. She turned in her chair so no one could hear us.

“You remember the second time you came to see me?” she asked. “You came alone.”

“The day your high school friends came to show off their newborn baby boy? Yeah I remember,” I said. “I kept him with me while they went through the whole photo and fingerprint business.”

“That’s them. I didn’t tell you they’ve been sweethearts ever since they were frosh in high school. I think that’s kind of wonderful. That sort of thing can last, don’t you think?”

“Can or can’t last? Is that what you’re asking? Depends on many things and a few you can’t control. That’s really the basis of love stories, isn’t it? ‘Love conquers all.’ Do I believe that? I don’t know if I do. They look younger than we are. My guess is the odds are against it.”

Leslie twisted her expression as if to say, ‘Why’d you say that?’

I said, “Okay. For example, when you saw me holding that chubby baby, the first thing you did was put your fists on your hips, tilt your head to one side, shook your finger and mouthed the words ‘You didn’t tell me you had a baby.’”

Even Max, who overheard, looked up and laughed.

“So what’s your point, mister?”

“My point is these kids are in a romantic mood at the moment and that’s good. It’s lovely. But one of them will be sure to put the other on too high a pedestal and feel destroyed when they stagger. It’s inevitable. And if one of them should ever have their head turned by another admirer…they’ll end up despising each other.

“The point is…jealousy makes even the loveliest features turn ugly.”

“For some people, maybe. But I’m not the jealous type…or maybe I am…” Leslie started, but stopped.

Towards the end of our visit, Les and I went back to discussing plans for me to meet some of her family and more of her friends. Next on the list was a young woman named Judith Frutig, western bureau chief for *The Christian Science Monitor*. An old Van Houten family friend who worked for the *Los Angeles Times* had introduced her.

“I’ll give you the number to call,” Max, who wasn’t listening, said.

A couple of days later, Tricia took me on a tour of Venice Beach before dropping me off in Westwood to meet Judith Frutig. Judy picked me up at the corner of Le Conte and Westwood Boulevard near the south entrance leading in and out of the UCLA campus. She was driving a dark brown Datsun 240-Z with out-of-state plates and a 2.4 liter engine. Judy was about the same age as Leslie and me but seemed a bit older somehow. She wore her brown hair cut short in a ‘Scout’ Finch-type of pageboy.

Very bright and verbally active, I thought Judy a suitably attractive young woman in a tidy, courteous, mid-western way. (I say this after having spent two years in Athens, Ohio, which I loved.) She told me she’d studied journalism at Wayne State University in Detroit. And, on our way out to the jail for a visit, Judy told me about a recent series of stories she’d been running on Leslie and Max since before the retrial began. As it turned out, there was nothing in there I didn’t already know.

After a quick twenty-minute visit with Leslie, Judy dropped me back

in Santa Monica and promised to take me for oyster shooters the next day on a tour of Marina del Rey. She let me drive her car the whole time we were together. I liked that a lot.

"How long are you planning to stay in Los Angeles?" she asked.

"I start grad school this summer. In the meantime, I'm here living out of a gym bag and sleeping on my friend Trish's couch."

"You could stay with me and my sister, if you like?" Judy said. "We have a spare bedroom in our condo in Silver Lake, just a few blocks above Sunset Boulevard. There's a really big comfy bed and a desk with plenty of bookshelves."

"Any books on them?"

"Lots," she smiled. "It's a fairly large living space. Our balcony faces southwest toward Culver City. I'll show you."

"Sounds great." And it was.

Judy called me at Tricia's the next day and said, "You and I are invited to dinner in Monrovia to meet Leslie's mother, Jane. Glen and Doris Peters, friends of Jane's and mine, want to meet you, so they're having us over on Friday night."

Tricia was cool with me moving to 1707 Micheltorena Street. Also, I hadn't paid much attention or been very good company lately. As self-justification, I supposed she had another beau waiting in the wings. I tried to make believe I was clearing a space for him when really I was making room of my own for Leslie to take over. Trish came with me to the trial and after court drove my bags and me over to Judy's that same afternoon.

I caught a ride with Max after that and went out to the jail to ask Les what she thought of my move.

I told her, "This brings me closer to you, kind of."

That's when she asked me, "What do you call it when you can't wait to see someone or ever stop dreaming about being together alone?"

"The prelude," I said. "Lasts a week or two maybe."

Leslie's eyes glistened a bit and so did mine, along with a smile.

"Then it doesn't last?" A short pause. "Always, it doesn't?"

"Don't ask me, hon. I'd rather be in love than become an expert on it. It would depend…"

A long pause while we each stopped to consider the facts.

"Linda said you told her you've taken a lot of LSD," Leslie said by way of changing the subject.

"Yeah, so have you. It did me some good and it did me some harm, just like it says in the song. But I thought I'd written you about that months ago."

“So you know what was up with my life at the ranch…I wasn’t sure. You’ve been polite not to ask too many uneasy questions.”

“Look Les. We’ve discussed this before. I’ve had more than my fair share of most things.”

Which was a lie of course.

“I’m in no position to judge,” I added—which I wasn’t.

“That’s one way Manson controlled things, you know? Sex and drugs, I mean. Boy this is embarrassing,” she said. “You’ve read all that. He’d dole it out and start preachin’ and dancin’ and singing his songs. He was a trip if he got dancing. I can’t believe it now how I ever… How did I ever believe it? I still don’t know.

“I know what I did then was wrong. But I believed it wasn’t wrong when it was happening. I honestly didn’t. But how could that be? I was *convinced* it was the right thing because that’s what Charlie said was coming to pass. Does that make any sense? Not much, huh?”

“Yes,” I said, “in a way, it sounds just like a nightmare.”

“I’ve had more than a few bum trips before, but this was a doozy!”

Right near the end of that visit, Les did her best to give me a preview of a recent letter she’d sent c/o 1707 Micheltorena Street that I hadn’t received yet. She said this might be the right time to put me in the picture as far as her romantic status in prison. She wanted to tell me about what things were like for her at Frontera, where she’d had a steady girlfriend.

For my part, I told her I never understood why women weren’t strictly attracted to other women in the first place.

“Personally, I’ve never seen what women find so appealing in men. Or men with each other either. But love and sex with a steady, desirable woman is something even I can comprehend.”

“I’ll be glad we can talk on Sunday. It sure is fine having you to help me weigh these things out. I need you, and you know that now. And I can see how we really have gotten into talking about things… sharing opinions. I miss you so much when we’re apart, and it’s even worse the more time we’re together.”

I asked her, “Les, how do you think life will be different once you get out?”

“A lot like it is for you now,” she said. “Only with me popped into the picture.”

Here I was living in a swell condominium just up in the foothills between Griffith and Echo parks in Los Angeles. My new digs were only a few blocks from Sunset Boulevard. I got up early to lift and run

a couple of laps around the Silver Lake Reservoir. Afterwards, I relaxed beside the pool in the hot tub. Compared to the hellhole Leslie had to put up with, I was livin' the life of Riley.

Whenever Judy was home, she and I'd talk non-stop for hours drinking hot mugs of tea out on the balcony. There was always a great sunset horizon and after dark we used to stay up late to watch the city lights in place of the planets and stars. Respectful of her staunch religious bearing, I was astonished to find myself politely discussing Edward R. Murrow and Mary Baker Eddy without stimulants. Christian Science seemed to me more like the Koran than the Bible. Other than that, Judith and I got along very well, especially with regard to our mutual feelings for Leslie. In addition, besides the condo, the Datsun 240-Z and one third of the groceries, Judy shared all the files, clippings and photos she had been keeping on Les. Some of these were articles she authored herself, which I'd read before. The best of the new stuff I found came out of the court transcripts Max Keith had recently lent her.

One day that week after court, Judy and I were invited to dinner at the home of a couple old friends of hers, Gil and Terri. They lived a mile or so south of Mount Lee, within view of the famous Hollywood sign. Gil was an architect and Terri a lawyer. They had a quaint little bungalow with a single garage and a fair-sized concrete patio covered with wisteria and dotted with cactus and potted flowers.

After dinner, Terri and Judy squeezed into the jump seat of Gil's green Alfa Romeo Spider Veloce—a space equivalent in size and comfort to a couple of side-by-side toilet seats without any room on the floor for your feet. To my surprise, Gil buckled himself in on the passenger side and invited me to take the keys and controls. I wasted no time starting the two-liter and let her warm up, while I pulled the top down and adjusted my seat to make room for the girls. Once we were strapped in, I tore off for a quick spin up the Golden State Freeway around Griffith Park and west on to the Ventura Highway—just to warm up the tires. Then, I really started to show off, weaving in and out of slower traffic the whole way back down the Hollywood Freeway.

We got off somewhere near the strip and found a place to park in a lot on Franklin Avenue. From there, we walked along Hollywood Boulevard toward Grauman's Chinese Theater. The lineup for Star Wars looked as though it stretched for half a mile in every direction, and I had no idea what the hubbub over Luke Skywalker and Darth

Vader was about. I think I must have been expecting Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*—a film worthy of a two-hour lineup for tickets.

The four of us threw an impromptu picnic of French fries and banana bread on the sidewalk where we sat on the Hollywood stars of Dick Powell and Daryl Zanuck. During one phase of our interminable wait, Gil gave a young street entertainer two quarters to sing us a cover of the Everly Brothers' "When Will I Be Loved?" This fine-looking young man with a winsome smile started to dance and sway to the rhythm of that sad song that began, "I've been made blue, I've been lied to…"

That, for me, was the highlight of the evening's entertainment. I must be absolutely alone in this assessment, but I thought the movie *Star Wars* a bore. All those comic book costumes and the bad aim of faceless storm troopers left me profoundly disenchanted. I should have kept the car to myself and offered to pick up the trio of fantasy enthusiasts later. I was no fun afterwards either. The truth is, I was anxious to get back to Micheltorena Street, certain at some point that Leslie would ring me. And later that night when she did, I gave her my critique of "the worst movie ever." *Trix are for kids*.

The next day, I was poolside at Judy's, reading Lester Grinspoon's *Marihuana Reconsidered*—a signed copy he'd presented to Leslie with the inscription, "To Leslie, with best wishes and the hope that win or lose you will continue to grow. Lester."

I'd just finished chapter six of his book when I heard that unmistakable echo-sounding exhaust note of a lonely herd of one hundred Pomigliano d'Arco horses. When I looked over the fence to see for sure what it was, there was Gil parking his Alfa Romeo on Effie Street right beside the pool. I walked out to the street and right as I did as Judy pulled up in her Datsun with Terri. To my amazement, Gil said he was leaving me use of the Spider for the next couple of days if I wanted, while he went away to San Francisco on business. We jumped in the Z and all went to the beach to have lunch.

Having the use of Gil's Alfa Spider for a few days was a dream. I changed the seat position, adjusted the mirrors and let some air out of the rear Pirelli P3s. I drove her as if she were mine to hold on to, even for such a short time. I must have gone through two tanks of gas a day. My arms and face were sunburned. Nice as sunny-summer-southern California days can be, there's not a lot of shelter from the glaring sunlight if you don't put the top up. When moving at speed in a lightweight two-door convertible, the burnt-orange soot of LA smog can sandblast the paint off the hood of your car. Regardless, I was happy to get a few miles away from the city on Friday night with

Judy. It was a special night for me, especially since it was the first time I met Jane Van Houten, Leslie's mother.

Monrovia is about seven miles east of Pasadena. Glen and Doris Peters' house was on South Fairgreen Avenue. Right away, as we shook hands, I could sense their trepidation. Glen looked to me like another Fred Foot, only this time with a brush cut. Whereas I wore my hair ardently tussled and meant something by it, Mr. Peters' haircut signaled something different in those days. It wasn't only a matter of fashion that stood between us. It was a great divide between generations, culture and politics—and probably a whole lot more I wasn't aware of.

The Peters were old friends of Jane and her ex, Leslie's dad, Paul M. Van Houten. Glen said he worked for the *Los Angeles Times*, which led me to assume that journalism was his connection to Judy—that and their church. They shared a profound faith in the Christian Science religion. Glen and Doris had known Leslie ever since she and her siblings were kids growing up in Monrovia. That is, until she left home as a teen and ran away with a boyfriend to San Francisco. Since I thought Glen held the demeanor of the center-right, military dogma about him, I could imagine how he would have responded to Leslie's later running off to join up with Manson. Doris Peters, I have forgotten completely. I believe I only met her that once, but I could tell from the very beginning that her husband and I would be at odds soon enough over something.

Jane Van Houten arrived about twenty minutes after Judy and I got there. My first impressions never changed from the moment she stepped through the front door. I immediately recognized the resemblance to Leslie. Jane was what I would have described as an exceptionally handsome middle-aged woman. She had wavy white hair and an immense smile in her eyes, though her lips were downturned at the edges. If Jane felt the same caution with regards to me as the Peters had, I didn't notice. I was perfectly taken in by her poise, warmth and charm. Given the way she smiled at me throughout the evening, I was certain that she liked me as much as I found her attractive.

In the days that followed, I got to meet more of Leslie's friends and spent some days in court with her brother, David, and sister, Betsy. I also talked on the phone with Leslie as often as possible. Our time was

limited, so we still counted a lot on exchanging letters. I wasn't too surprised to find out I wasn't the first "pen pal" she'd had since she came clean of Charles Manson. I thought that was long over now. Only a few days after meeting her mom and Glen Peters, a letter from Leslie arrived that read in part:

"Tomorrow, 'Pete' [Glen Peters] will probably come with Mom for a visit. Mama says, by the way, to be sure to tell you 'hello' and said to send you her love. She wants you to call her. Pete said on the phone he hadn't got my letter yet—the one I told you about—but wanted to see me in person. I know one thing we need to discuss is what to do about Frank Andrews and the letters/publishing scene. Max is mad about it too. Tomorrow, I will discuss it with Pete, but then I have a huge hunch that attorneys will be getting into the matter. Talk about exploitation. That Frank Andrews—man! Such a bunch of crooks! A bunch of sneaky no good punks. It should all prove to be quite interesting. I find it ironic how 'perfect' this is all supposed to be, when I don't know a damn thing about it. And how 'wrong' anything else I say is. It will straighten out. I need to make a list so I can clue you in on all the happenings."

* * *

Frank Andrews walked out of prison after thirteen years served of an original fifty-five to sixty-seven year sentence. He served hard time for a series of armed robberies and an escape attempt in which he wounded a sheriff's deputy. Andrews was thirty-seven years old—ten years older than Leslie—when he started to write her in prison. He'd already spent half his lifetime in one kind of jail or another. Sound familiar, Charlie?

What convinced prison authorities Andrews might deserve a second chance was his dedication to writing, which he demonstrated during his many years inside.

"At one point, I thought I was to all intents and purposes a dead man," he wrote, "I never really believed they would release me."

He sold his first short story to a journal in 1967 and co-edited an anthology of prison writing, *Voices from the Big House,* in 1971. Andrews became a leading light from within the dark walls of the New Jersey State Penitentiary. Author Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter was an inmate there as well—a college of writers.

"The parole board asked me if I might be tempted to go back to crime," Frank Andrews said at the time *Voices* was published. "I told them I never made more than a hundred bucks in any job I ever

pulled. Now, I can double that by just sitting down at a typewriter for a few hours."

Quite a guy, I imagined. Andrews contributed to at least two more prison anthologies that no one ever heard of. However, in one, *Prose and Cons*, there was a particularly charming story, "Ima Fibbin" written by Leslie Van Houten. Why was I so jealous of Frank Andrews even if Leslie was past it? I thought it might be on account of his being a writer, if not a very good boyfriend.

* * *

I picked Jane Van Houten up at home on Sefton Avenue at 8:00 a.m. We drove out to Sybil Brand to visit Les in Gil's Alfa Romeo. I left the top up to keep the wind out of her hair. Right from the start, Jane took to calling me "Honey," which I adored. When I dropped her back at home in Monterey Park, this time she said to pull into the alley. She made me brunch while I washed and waxed Gil's car in her garage. I stayed all day and night talking to Jane about Leslie, her childhood and how some dreams come true while others fall apart. After Mexican food with Les's adopted sister Betsy and next-door neighbor Georgie Calhoun, I spent the night in Jane's guest room. The wallpaper in there was made of bamboo and the carpet was thick and warm.

The next morning, Gil's wife, Terri, dropped him off at Jane's to pick up his car. He let me drive the Spider one last time back to Silver Lake, where I traded the Alfa for Judy's respectable Datsun 240-Z. She was away on assignment. After that, I went for a run. I started west on Effie Street then swung right on Griffith Park all the way to Hyperion Avenue. Another right past the Rowena Reservoir and then left on to Waverly Drive as far as the end of the driveway to number 3301. There it was.

Things were very quiet and still. I must have stood there for a very long time. I never told anyone about it. Not even Leslie. No reason to really. What could I say that she didn't already know? What was once a peaceful space a family called home was now the vacant site of a catastrophe. It felt to me as though I stood at the end of the road where a bomb had gone off and left nothing but ruins. It was a slow walk back to Micheltorena. I was thinking the whole time about Rosemary LaBianca. After a prolonged and icy-cold shower, I pre-cooked peppers, onions and tomato sauce for dinner before driving out to LAX to pick Judy up. On the way home we stopped for wine, cheese and oysters to put on the crackers. She asked me why I was

looking so glum. When we stepped into the condo, Judy's sister Jennifer told me there had been a phone call for me while I was away.

"Someone named Martin Bijaux wants you to call him. His number's beside the phone. He said it was urgent."

When I called, Martin picked up right away and told me he had tragic news from back home.

* * *

Buck Buchanan had been instantly killed in a car crash. He and another friend of ours were on their way north from Kingston to Ottawa when they were struck head on by an eighteen-wheel tractor trailer. The truck driver survived the collision but Tiit Romet, who was asleep in the back seat of Jim's car, woke up in the hospital a day later. He had a concussion and a broken arm. Tricia and I both had a good cry when I told her. I also thought about Jim on and off for a few days as a way to adjust to the loss of a good friend.

This caused me to reflect on the twisted fate of our being in the wrong place at the wrong time and the consequences of having the forces of physics conspire against you in such a brutal and sudden way. I thought of how easily it could have been me that got into the car that night with Buck and Tiit after the track meet at Queen's University. Just as it could have been me that got into ranch hand Johnny Swartz's yellow Ford at Spahn Ranch right before midnight on Friday, August 8th 1969, the night *before* the bloodbath at LaBiancas'—the night Manson's Helter Skelter really got started.

Kids like Leslie and I had to leave home and strike out on the road with a taste for adventure. The summer of '69 that Leslie spent on Spahn Ranch with the Manson Family, I spent a very brief time at the Satan's Choice motorcycle club's farmhouse and headquarters in Agincourt, Ontario. I stumbled in there one day with some girls I'd met who knew a few of the bikers and invited me along for a "field day" of races, jousting and a huge drunken orgy, if we hung around until dawn. I was tripping at a mighty clip on mescaline when this "leader of the pack"—who appeared to me as the reincarnation of Che Guevara—started rapping about my maybe joining his band of rebels. I could have effortlessly stayed a few more weekends just to see how the set and setting collided.

I had been lucky though, far more fortunate than Leslie had been. Mentors like high school Principal Jackson Tovell and Olympic athletics Coach Andy Higgins pulled me out of those traps and gave me a richer environment in which to develop. Disillusioned by my sour family life and braved for adventure, I might have stumbled into

such powerful diseases of exposure as Charlie Manson.

I asked myself, what if Manson had imbued me with the same deceits as the others? I tried to imagine if I'd been in Tex Watson's shoes. We had both played football and been track stars in high school, though we held nothing else in common. Since he had been one of Leslie's boyfriends when she sought protection from some of the bikers, I'd be sure to ask her about him. All I recalled from what I'd read so far was that he grew up in Copeville, Texas, dropped out of high school and ran off to Los Angeles. One day, he stopped to pick up a hitchhiker. The guy with his thumb out was none other than Beach Boys drummer Dennis Wilson, whose Ferrari was in the shop. Wilson took Watson back to his house on Sunset Boulevard. When they got there, Dennis introduced Tex to Charles Manson and a slew of half-naked girls tripping on acid.

False promotions aside for the moment, Manson's main theories in practice were derived from years of post-graduate studies in prisons of every sort. Therefore, he'd had advanced tutorials in pimping, guns, drugs, knives, racism, fascism, violence, different ways to rob banks and how to survive in the desert. Charlie also befriended Alvin 'Creepy' Karpis, a former member of Ma Barker's "Bloody Barkers' Gang"—one of the most notorious and formidable criminal gangs in American history. Manson met Karpis, who was sentenced to life for the murder of a sheriff in Missouri, after he was transferred to McNeil Island State Penitentiary in Washington, where Manson was serving time for solicitation and stealing.

Karpis taught Charles Manson to play the steel guitar. Creepy said later that he didn't think his protégée was a very good musician. But Charlie was fervent to the point of obsession. He began scribbling songs and started singing, believing that when he got out of prison he could become a famous rock music legend.

"Bigger than Elvis or The Beatles," he imagined.

Manson asked Alvin to put him in touch with his contacts in the Las Vegas casinos.

Karpis remarked, "Charlie had a thing for the desert."

Other concentrations Manson studied in prison, besides The Beatles and the Bible, were L. Ron Hubbard's *Scientology,* Robert Heinlein's novel *Stranger in a Strange Land* and Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. These books taught him a lot and gave him plenty to play with. For example, one of Dale Carnegie's basic tenets was to "Let the other fellow feel that the idea is his." That way, for instance, Charlie was able to get Tex to *do something* to get their brother, Bobby Beausoleil, off for having killed Hinman. Because

Manson told him, Hinman was a snitch that was going to go to the cops and turn the whole Family in. Gary was a traitor, he said, just like Terry Melcher and Dennis Wilson. Now something had to be done, right? Maybe copycat murders to lead police to believing the real killers were still out there roaming free? Now there's an idea.

So Charlie asked Tex whom he thought they might get to *lead* the others on such a mission and which targets seemed *right*. Was there some place secluded where they could slaughter some rich pigs and not be detected? How about somewhere like the house Terry Melcher used to live in? After all, Tex knew the way there and the layout. He'd been there before when Charlie went looking for Terry. This would sure send that lying deserter a message.

* * *

August 8th, 1969, at Spahn Movie Ranch began like so many others, as far as the girls were concerned anyway. Their job was to look after the men, cooking and cleaning up the mess, then taking care of the kids and the gardens—all except Susan Atkins. She spent the day snorting grams of powdered methamphetamine with Tex Watson, who had been tripping as well for days on regular, hard hits of acid.

In the evening, less than twenty miles away, Sharon Tate and her houseguests Jay Sebring, Abigail Folger and Voytek Frykowski met for dinner at the El Coyote restaurant on Beverly Boulevard. Coincidently, Voytek had been on a forty-eight hour drug binge himself. Same sorts of stuff. Everybody in LA was on one kind of junk or another. However much you took of what over how many days, months and hours was relative.

Still well before midnight, Manson took Watson aside and spoke to him about how to make these killings look like the work of the same people they wanted police to suspect for the killing of Hinman. From Watson's point of view, it was his own idea to pick some place private —somewhere there were sure to be rich and famous people. That would serve to ignite the race war Charlie'd promised his Family. What a great idea, Tex. Atta boy, way to go, Manson told him.

Then, point blank he asked him, "Will you die for me?"

An easily misperceived tribute to someone like Tex, who so desperately sought Manson's approval.

Take three girls with you, Manson told Tex. Susan Atkins was a good bet since she'd been with Beausoleil and Brunner when they killed Hinman. He should also take Patricia Krenwinkel and Linda Kasabian. Charlie told him, after he'd killed everyone at the house, to

be sure and leave the same sort of bloody writing. He told him what equipment to take with him: an extra change of dark clothes, wire cutters, a length of rope, a military bayonet and Charlie's .22 caliber revolver.

Then, Manson took each of the girls aside to give them specific instructions. He told them to bring along a change of clothes and their buck knives. Patricia Krenwinkel said at this point she didn't know for certain what was going to occur. But Susan Atkins did, which explains why Manson told Susan to "Do something witchy," same as the last time. To each of the other girls he simply commanded, "Go with Tex and do *exactly* what he tells you to."

The Polanskis' elegant ranch-style house at the end of Cielo Drive sat on its own shelf of land in the Santa Monica Mountains. To get to there from Chatsworth, Tex would have driven past UCLA along West Sunset Boulevard and wound his way up Benedict Canyon. Despite having been there before, Tex got lost a few times before he could find the right cul-de-sac to turn in on. He was still tripping on acid and clobbered on speed. Riding along in the backseat on the way into LA, Pat said she had the feeling she was being entwined in the entrails of some monstrous beast.

In those days, Cielo Drive was little more than a narrow dirt road that dead-ended at the gates to what was, until recently, the home of actress Candice Bergen and music producer Terry Melcher. Melcher was the son of a famous Hollywood film star, Doris Day. With the gates locked at midnight, you wouldn't be able to see far enough up the driveway to where the house was, because it sat so far back in the hillside.

When Watson saw the closed wrought-iron gates blocking the entrance, he thought they might be electrified. No matter. He knew what to do. First, he shimmied up the pole by the gates and used the bolt cutters he brought to sever the phone lines. Then, he and the girls climbed the embankment that bypassed the fences and gates. All of a sudden, they saw car lights approaching from the direction of the house and crouched down to hide in the brush alongside the driveway. An unlucky eighteen year old, Steven Parent, who had been visiting his friend Bill Garretson in the guesthouse, was driving the car.

Just as Parent slowed to the gate, Watson jumped out from the bushes and yelled, "Halt!"

Then, he thrust the revolver inside the open window.

Seeing the gun pointed at his face, Parent pleaded, “Please don’t hurt me. I won’t say anything.”

With his arm up defensively to guard himself, Tex slashed him with his knife on the forearm before pulling the trigger four times. The bullets tore through young Mr. Parent’s arm and face. After turning the engine and lights off, Tex pushed the car to the side of the drive and told the girls to follow him up to the house. As each of the girls passed by the open door of Parent’s car they could see the young man bleeding to death from the head. He was already unconscious. Now, they were getting an inkling of what was about to happen.

At night, the Christmas lights that former tenant Candice Bergen had strung along the split-rail fence in front of the house glowed under a heavy darkness. When the attackers reached the house, Tex sent the girls around back to look for an unlocked door or window. Nothing so far. Then, he told Linda to go back down the drive and watch out for anything unexpected. Tex used his bayonet to cut the screen on the window to the room that was intended to be the Polanskis’ nursery. It was being readied for the arrival of Sharon and Roman’s son, Paul Richard. The baby was due in less than a month.

Once inside the house, Tex opened the front door to let Susan and Pat into the premises. In the living room were high-beam ceilings and a loft above. Everywhere, piles of books and film scripts lay strewn about. In front of the stone fireplace, passed out on the sofa, was Roman’s Polish friend, Voytek Frykowski.

Tex put the open barrel of the gun to his face and told him, “Don’t move, or you’re dead.”

Startled and groggy, Voytek asked him, “Well...who are you, and what are you doing here?”

“I’m the Devil,” growled Watson. “I’m here to do the Devil’s business. Give me all of your money.”

“My money is in the wallet on the desk.”

Susan Atkins said she couldn’t find it. That made Tex very angry. Watson started to beat Frykowski with the Buntline revolver until he gave way to his blows. Then, he ordered Susan to tie the man up before dispatching her and Pat to scout the rest of the house for others.

Abigail Folger was sitting up in her bedroom reading. There were hashish and ten capsules of MDA in a bag on the nightstand. Sharon Tate and Jay Sebring were in the master bedroom sitting up on the bed talking. (A gram of cocaine and less than an ounce of marijuana was left undiscovered in Jay Sebring’s Porsche.) Armed with buck knives, Susan and Pat herded everyone into the living room where

they were tied up together.

Then, when Watson ordered everyone to lie face down on the floor—including a very expectant Sharon Tate—Jay Sebring protested, "Let her sit down, can't you see she's *pregnant*?"

Watson shot him in the armpit with the revolver and told the screaming women once more to shut the fuck up.

Sharon and Abigail were hysterical. Watson strung them up with nooses around their necks, so they had to stand straight and be quiet or else strangle to death. While Jay lay on the floor unconscious and bleeding—in full view of the others—Tex proceeded to viciously stab him in the back several times. The women were crying and began pleading for their lives.

"What are you going to do with us?" Abigail cried.

Tex said, "You're all going to die."

Then, he ordered Susan to kill Voytek.

"Oh, God...no...don't...don't...don't," the man pleaded.

Then, in a panic, he suddenly jumped up, broke free and began fighting with Susan, swinging her around by her hair. Before she lost her knife in the fracas, Atkins managed to stab Voytek several times in the legs and once in the back of the lung, simply by stabbing blindly behind her.

Screaming for his life, Frykowski bolted for the front door. Tex, meanwhile, was distracted with stabbing Jay Sebring until he stopped moving. Pat was fighting with the two tied-up women while Tex chased after Frykowski. When he caught up with the wounded man, he began clobbering him over the head with the butt of his gun. Beaten and bloodied, Frykowski fell through the doorway and into the bushes out front on the threshold. Linda Kasabian saw him stand again for a moment before Tex tackled him onto the front lawn, hitting and stabbing him senseless.

Standing over the fallen man like Ali over Liston, Watson shot him once in the back before the gun misfired the second time. Then, Tex proceeded to club Voytek with the butt of Manson's Buntline revolver so ferociously that the grip handle broke off. Tex shot him once more for good measure. All this time, Kasabian said she just stood in shock and watched as Watson repeatedly stabbed Mr. Frykowski's fractured body until all his tremors stopped.

Tell me, tell me, tell me the answer…

Frantic with terror, Abigail Folger managed to twist free of her restraints and made a break for the bedroom door at the back of the house. Patricia Krenwinkel gave chase and set upon her with her buck knife out by the pool. The victim continued to struggle until Watson,

who had just finished his annihilation of Frykowski, took over and slashed Abigail's throat with his knife.

Susan Atkins testified that the instant before Tex cut her off at the neck, the woman looked up at him and whispered, "I give up. I'm dead. Take me."

Pat told Leslie that when she stabbed the woman she heard her whisper, "I'm already dead."

When Tex shuffled back inside, he saw that Sharon had slipped free and ordered Susan and Pat to finish her off.

When she begged and pleaded for her life and the life of her unborn baby, Susan looked her straight in the eye and said, "Look bitch, I don't care about you. I don't care if you're going to have a baby. You had better be ready. You're going to die, and I don't feel anything about it."

Meanwhile, Watson made certain everyone else was either dead or dying, before he finally strode over to where Susan was holding Sharon's arms behind her back. Then, the meth-crazed fanatic viciously thrust his bayonet through the woman's lung and heart until it stopped beating. Tex had effectively destroyed five human souls in a matter of minutes.

In the aftermath, Tex told the girls to take turns mutilating their victims' lifeless bodies. Susan Atkins painted the word 'PIG' in Sharon Tate's blood on the front door. The whole assault lasted approximately half an hour. Then, everything returned to the same quiet as before. When the assassins returned to their car, Watson still had a terrible look in his eyes. In fact, Kasabian later testified they all looked like zombies covered with blood. Tex was yelling at Susan for losing her knife. The crew stopped a few miles away from this site and used someone's garden hose to wash off all the gore. They changed into clean clothes and tossed their bloody clothing down a washed-out ravine. After which, they drove back to Spahn Ranch around two in the morning. Charles Manson was standing in the same spot he had been when they drove off only hours before.

Manson had been awaiting news as to how things had gone. Watson told him how most of it went according to plan. For instance, there were butchered bodies lying around all over the lawn. He had the audacity to complain about the inadequacy of the weapons, which he blamed for the screaming panic, fighting and overall bloody messiness.

Manson asked all four of them, Tex, Susan, Pat and Linda, "Do you have any remorse?"

All shook their heads and said, "No." Then, Manson told them to

go to bed and be sure not to say anything to the others—not yet anyway.

Once everyone else was asleep, Manson drove to the scene of the crime. He wanted to see for himself what the others had done, as well as clean up any prints they may have missed in the frenzy. The walls were splashed with gore, and there were large pools of dark blood beginning to jell beneath each of the ripped and ravished corpses. He draped an American flag upside down over the sofa next to where Sharon Tate's body lay in the last of her blood. Then, he wiped the house clean of fingerprints and tossed the bloody towel over what there was left of Jay Sebring's skull.

10

JUST ASK ROMAN POLANSKI

Which fallen angels haunted my sleep I didn't know. They found me trudging knee-deep in a desert of snowdrifts, shivering with cold. In this dreamscape of unmemorable colors, I wondered how nice it would be if it were warmer. In a flash, I recognized that this was my dream after all. Therefore, it *could* be summer if I wanted it so. The trespass of ice suddenly vanished and in its place I willed a landscape of summer greens, yellows, pinks and blues into view. Things came alive but only for a moment. An instant later, winter returned.

I decided to stay on my trek through the snow and ice to see where it led me. There came into sight an old wooden shed that looked like a derelict barn from a distance. Inside the shed, there was a dusty, long silver beast of a classic E-type Jaguar—only the top was ragged and torn and the tires were deflated. There was a pretty girl asleep on the passenger side wearing nothing but a necklace of beads interwoven with flowers. She sat on my lap, as we drove off in the car. She steered, while I worked the pedals. A blizzard had started when, out of nowhere, a cop on a motorcycle came alongside us, shouting, "Do you know Jim Buchanan? He's dead."

I wondered what the girl thought we should do about the weather, but the radio woke me with a forecast of sunshine and warmth.

Martin Bijaux rang and said he had a next-morning flight out of LAX and asked if I could meet him for breakfast then drop him off at the airport. He picked a spot close to his girlfriend's flat in West Hollywood. Canter's Bakery and Delicatessen was on North Fairfax between Melrose and Beverly. There was a familiar Neil Young song

playing as I walked in at ten past eight in the morning.

Canter's was a lot like a typical Montreal-style deli or Yitz's on Eglinton West in Toronto. Martin was already there having coffee. We both ordered rugelach to have with our second cups.

"For some reason 'Like a Hurricane' always reminds me of Leslie," I said.

"It reminds me of a bar in Ottawa," Martin responded.

"Speaking of Ottawa, I want to thank you again for getting the message about Jim to me when you did."

"Did you know Buchanan well?"

"I knew Buck for a couple of years on account of track and field at Toronto. He was probably the most popular guy on the team. Great sense of humor. Plus, he was an outstanding overall athlete which would have been scary if he hadn't sucked so bad at hockey."

"Have you spoken with anyone close to the family?" he asked.

"I spoke with Bruce Kidd on the phone, and to Andy and Carl Georgevski. That's it so far." Then, I paused. "You know, Martin. Everything disappears with death, doesn't it? It's nothing deep or profound, just how it feels to me personally. A year ago, training here in LA, Buck had a personal best in the long jump...somewhere in the 7.82 meter range. That's as *alive* as it gets. And, now, that spirit's gone. It's just gone."

Not so inclined to think about spirit and death nonsense as I was, Martin asked, "How good a jump is that?"

"In the world? Look at it this way...all the men who jumped over 7.80 in Montreal advanced to the final. That's a rare talent, wouldn't you say? There are fewer than twenty who can accomplish this feat."

We talked about other things too, like about where Martin was flying to later that morning (Detroit) and what kind of story he hoped to write (on the history of Motown Records). Listening to this only as background, I was still thinking about Jim's life and death at that time. Conscious of nothing at all really—only his absence—as well as the ever-present threat of my own. I hadn't really thought about death all that much until that summer. That's how young I was.

After breakfast, we tossed his bags in the back of Judy's car, turned the key, dropped the clutch and put the spurs to the Datsun. We went barreling down Highway 405 mostly in third and hard on the throttle. When we hit traffic, I shifted up a gear to relax the engine as well as Martin. That's when he started talking again.

"Where the fuck did you get hold of this car?" he asked with excitement.

I explained about Judy Frutig and the connection to Leslie by way

of family friends intent on Christian Science and journalism.

"That's quite a combo… Hey, have you been keeping up with the news about Roman Polanski?" Martin shouted over the engine whining. "He's been back to court, you know. The judge, Rittenband, thinks Polanski's a pervert, so he denied a petition to have the rape charges dropped. Doping and raping a drunk, precocious thirteen year old girl, if convicted, can get him fifty-years in the big house."

"I don't think he deserves that," I said. "Nobody does. Polanski may be a slightly-warped swinger, but he's probably not the worst of the lot…"

"Nor the last, I imagine." Martin added. "He's an artist. Maybe that gives him the right to be twisted. His films are on the edge, so why wouldn't he be?"

"What about the young girl out on the ledge with him?" I asked.

"She was there with her mother's permission, having her picture taken for *Vogue*. Maybe Roman needed a way to put the right pout on her face that he wanted?

"Do you know how old Sharon Tate was when Polanski seduced her?" Martin asked, and then answered his own question. "Twenty-two. I heard they were both tripping on acid the first time."

"Everyone wants something wicked sometime. No one's immune to human nature," I guessed.

We were just pulling in to the airport. Inside the LAX World Way terminal loop, I dropped Martin and his two pieces of luggage off by the curb outside the United Airways departures desk. From there, he was headed to Detroit via Chicago. I wished him a good story and a safe journey home.

He surprised me when he said, "Wish Leslie good luck for me, will you?"

I nodded and said that I would. "And say 'hi' to Jean when you see him back in Toronto. I'm sorry about your friend, Jim."

Back in court the next morning, I heard Deputy District Attorney Stephen Kay keep harping on testimony Leslie had given six years before. Kay insisted on reminding this jury what Leslie said in 1971, when she was asked if she felt any remorse for the part she played in the killing.

Leslie famously answered, "Sorry is only a five-letter word."

In 1977, what she said was, "I feel very ashamed…I don't feel the same way today."

Stephen Kay implied she was lying.

When I asked her about it later that evening, Leslie told me, "When I said what I said about 'sorry' being only a word, that wasn't meant

to sound unremorseful, you know? I really felt these murders *had* to be done. That's what Charlie led us to believe. Therefore, what reason was there to feel sorry? That's how messed up I was. I know that sounds cruel, and it was. But that's honestly how I was thinking."

* * *

Facing the death penalty in 1971, Maxwell Keith vehemently argued that Leslie Van Houten deserved to live.

In his closing, he said, "Mr. Bugliosi tells you that if the death penalty is not appropriate in this case, it would never be appropriate. Well, I wonder if it ever is appropriate. I am not asking you to forgive her, although to forgive is divine. I am asking you to give her the chance to redeem herself. She deserves to live. What she did was not done by the real Leslie. Let the Leslie of today die...she will, slowly and maybe painfully. And let the Leslie as she once was live again."

The first trial lasted nine and a half months. Up until then, it was the longest murder trial in American history and also the most expensive. It cost over one million dollars. The jurors had been sequestered for two hundred and twenty-five days. That's longer than any jury before it. And the transcripts ran to two hundred and nine volumes.

In his conclusion, Judge Older said, "After all of the hyperbole has been indulged in, all that remains are the bare, stark facts of seven senseless murders...seven people whose lives were snuffed out by total strangers. I have carefully looked, in considering this action, for mitigating circumstances and have been unable to find any. It is my considered judgment that not only is the death penalty appropriate, but it is almost compelled by the circumstances. I must agree with the prosecutor that if this is not a proper case for the death penalty, what would be?"

Then, speaking directly to the defendants, the judge added, "The Department of Corrections is ordered to deliver you to the custody of the warden of the state prison of the state of California at San Quentin to be by him put to death in the manner prescribed by law of the state of California."

A tooth for a tooth after all.

Here's something I hope never to see the inside of—I'm told the San Quentin gas chamber contains a couple side-by-side perforated seats like you would expect to find on some old farmer's tractor. Two

guards strap each of the prisoners into the chairs and attach belts across their legs, arms and chest. Beneath the chairs are bowls filled with sulphuric acid, and there's a pound of sodium cyanide pellets suspended in a gauze bag just above that. After the door to the death chamber is sealed, the warden gives a signal for the executioner to pull the lever that drops the cyanide into the acid pool under the seat. The chemical reaction immediately causes hydrogen cyanide gas to be released into the chamber.

In medical terms, victims die from "hypoxia," which means the supply of oxygen to all vital organs, including the brain, has been cut off. At first, this results in muscle spasms and seizures due to increasing suffocation, but, because of the straps, involuntary body movements are minimized. The prisoner doesn't lose consciousness right away either. It can take one to three minutes to completely pass out, during which time the pain is akin to a respiratory/cardiac arrest. The horror, they say, continues to intensify until the eyes bug right out of their sockets. Skin turns a bruised purple and blue as a stew of blood and froth flows from the nose and mouth. It can take between nine and twelve minutes before the heart muscle finally grinds to a halt. Exhaust fans suck the gas out of the compartment and the bodies are robotically sprayed with ammonia. After half an hour, staff enter the chamber wearing gas masks and rubber gloves. Their training manual advises them to be sure and ruffle the victims' hair before taking their corpses away on a tray in a body bag. Poison that strong tends to linger.

In 1972, the California State Supreme Court rescinded the death penalty, noting that execution by means of containment in a cyanide gas chamber met the criteria defined as "cruel and unusual punishment." Although the state reinstated the death penalty four years later, it did not affect Leslie or any of her co-defendants, becasue the new statutes were not retroactive. And since legislation handing out life imprisonment without the possibility of parole wasn't in place yet, this meant that, according to state law, the "Manson murderers" were entitled to the possibility of ensuing freedom. The law would have to decide on a case-by-case basis exactly when each individual no longer poses a threat to society. That sounded fair to both Leslie and Maxwell S. Keith.

At the time he published *Helter Skelter* in 1974, author Vincent Bugliosi remarked, "The average incarceration in California for first-degree murder is ten and a half to eleven years. Because of the

hideous nature of their crimes and the total absence of mitigating circumstances, my guess is that all will serve longer periods…the girls fifteen to twenty years, the men, with the exception of Manson himself, a like number…my guess he will remain in prison for at least twenty-five years, and, quite possibly, the rest of his life."

Bugliosi published these estimates more than forty years ago. By the time of her next parole hearing in 2018, Leslie will have served forty-eight years. Turns out Bugliosi hadn't been right about most things.

* * *

Two weeks after the murder of Rosemary and Leno LaBianca, Manson ordered another person killed. Only, this time, it was someone very specific. Donald 'Shorty' Shea was a foreman at Spahn Ranch. He was the ninth and final victim in the Manson murder spree that began a month before, beginning with Gary Hinman.

Manson and Shea never got along. And, since Shorty was continually trying to convince George Spahn to run the Manson Family off the ranch, Charlie concluded that it was Shorty who snitched to police about the drug dealing, car theft and rumors of more strange, sinister goings on. Two weeks after the Tate-LaBianca murders, Manson enticed Shea to take a ride with him and three of the guys into the nearby mountains.

Shorty got into a car with Tex Watson, Steve Grogan and Bruce Davis. Manson took another car and followed behind. They drove to a spot a short distance away in the Santa Susana Pass, where Manson once took Leslie to the edge of a cliff under duress. There, his would-be killers beat Mr. Shea over the head with a wrench and carved him with their machetes and bayonets until dead. They buried Shorty near the train tracks, and, despite rumors of decapitation, Shea's body was not dismembered. However, part of his left hand was missing from the shallow grave where it was discovered. He died from several skull fracture blows to the head along with multiple chop and stab wounds to the rest of this body.

Manson, Watson and Davis remain in prison, of course, but Steve Grogan became the first and, so far, *only* Manson Family member convicted of murder to be released from prison. Grogan served fifteen years for his role in the killing of Shorty Shea. Originally found guilty and sentenced to death for first-degree murder on December 23rd 1971, Judge James Kolts decided that Grogan was "too stupid and too hopped on drugs to decide anything on his own," and that it was

really “Manson who decided who lived or died.”

Therefore, the judge reduced Grogan’s sentence to life imprisonment. Grogan, also known as Clem, later drew the authorities a map to where Shea’s body was buried, and that’s the reason he was let go in 1985.

* * *

On Thursday, June 9th, 1977, I was in court when Leslie testified about how things changed so dramatically at Spahn Ranch throughout 1969.

When asked by Max Keith about what life was like when she first joined the Family a year before that, Leslie said, “At that time, it was a mellow situation. It was an easy, slow life. No one had any ambitions or goals in life, other than to get rid of our thoughts and live only for the moment. That’s what Spahn was all about then. Manson’s songs and lyrics were about loving your fellow man. It was what I had been looking for.”

Then, she testified by the spring of that year, there was an increased mood of fear and anger surrounding Manson that replaced all the peace and love that had gone on before.

Leslie only stayed with Manson in the first place because she was seeking a spiritual advisor to lead her on the path to enlightenment. Lots of the girls her age were of that mindset. Those were the times and circumstances. Then, of course, he kept them isolated from their family and friends so he might bend their wills to his own. For instance, Charlie would malign or abuse any girl who dared get out of line. Then, he’d immediately follow that up with a full dose of ecstasy (or LSD) and a firm bout of sex with his victim. Manson didn’t want girls who were totally wrecked—only fractured.

Other cardinal rules Manson learned from the more experienced crooks and pimps in prison were things like: Never allow the girls to carry their own money—even coins, let alone dollars. That way, they couldn’t pay for a call to friends or relatives or buy themselves a bus ticket home. And if a girl refused to perform as she was told, Manson might strip her naked of all but her bruises and teach her a lesson in front of the others. He used the same tricks a lot.

The girls learned never to seem put off or refuse a man’s advances. And, for special business partners such as Terry Melcher and Gregg Jakobson, Charlie insisted that the prettiest girls—Ruth Ann and Leslie—be on ready call. It helped that both Quisch and Les liked to hang out with some of the bikers anyway. Les told me she liked this one

guy named 'Sammy' in particular. She said he was a lot of fun, though not very handsome—kind of like Vince Bugliosi, only with hair and a real sense of humor.

Then, came more testimony about Charlie's obsession with The Beatles *White Album*. Former cult members spoke about the delusional belief system Manson created for them to accept his word on the subject as gospel. Several admitted that they believed Charles Manson was the actual figure of Christ and that The Beatles were in on this secret, disguising this message in their songs.

During her time on the stand, Leslie described herself as a huge Beatles fanatic long before she ever met Manson. She said the cult was astounded to learn their leader was *so special* that The Beatles encoded messages meant only for him and the Family. And, by repeating over and over how The Beatles were charging him to trigger an inevitable race war called "Helter Skelter," Manson convinced her and the others they were destined to raise from the smoldering heap of ashes left after the war.

Leslie admitted under oath, "I felt he [Charlie] was more special than anyone I had ever met and felt that everything he said was the truth …"

She believed the Manson Family was destined to rule over the world and restore it to peace—just like it said in the *White Album*, or so she and the others believed with all of their hearts. Why is that so hard for some to imagine?

Sometime in June 1977, the jurors were also told about how, at the time of the investigations into the Tate-LaBianca murders in December 1969, LAPD detective Mike McGann offered Leslie immunity protection. (It's worth pointing out that Bugliosi once offered immunity to Susan Atkins as well but finally settled the deal with Linda Kasabian.) The police also promised Leslie a $25,000 reward in exchange for all she could tell them about the slayings. And, even though this would have saved her from prosecution (and therefore the death chamber), Leslie declined their offer.

Max Keith asked her 'Why?' and she answered, "I felt kind of like I was sitting in the seat of Judas. I knew if I needed twenty-four hour protection, I would be doing something that wouldn't please Charlie. I just played games with him [McGann]."

Weeks later, at the beginning of the New Year, Leslie Van Houten was indicted for murder. After all, if she *had* taken the pledge for immunity, that wouldn't have pleased Charlie. She feared him more than the gas chamber. Now tell me, if that isn't crazy, what is?

* * *

Friday morning, June 10th, 1977, Glen Peters, who told Leslie he had something urgent to discuss with her, bumped me from the visitor's lineup. I suspected it had to do with the publishing deal he had brokered between Frank Andrews and Leslie gone sour. But this had nothing whatsoever to do with me, unless she asked for my opinion. Since I was uninformed in the matter, the best I could do for her was to confirm whatever she told me.

After a four-set workout with a ninety-pound curling bar Judy's neighbor lent me, I went for a run and cooled down in the pool. Jane Van Houten called and invited me over for lunch, where I met Leslie's brother David's wife, Shannon. Les's sister, Betsy, whom I was friends with, was also there. My social space was expanding. That evening, I went out with Judy and Max for dinner in Pasadena. It was just after midnight when Jude and I got back to Micheltorena. Her sister, Jenn, left me a message, asking me to call Glen Peters when I got in. But, being so late, I didn't return his call.

The telephone ringing woke me at 7:10 a.m., when Jennifer brought the receiver into my room. It was Glen. He said he wanted to see me that morning and asked if I could meet him at his office in the *Los Angeles Times* building at First and Spring Streets. He took me for soup and sandwiches in the remarkable Pablo Picasso Room, where we sat at a table alongside portraits of whom I was told represented Marie-Thérèse Walter, Dora Maar and Jacqueline Rogue.

After an overture of polite chitchat, Glen finally finished stirring his soup and said, "I won't waste your time or mine, Peter. So I'll just say this. Okay? I'm concerned for Leslie and for you. I don't want either of you to be hurt or fooled by the fantasy picture frame in which you see yourselves."

"Picture frame?" I challenged, thinking it best to put on a good fore-check before he got started. "Do you mind me asking how so?" I asked this rather sternly in response to his tone.

"Cut it out, Peter. You know what I mean. That glass window you and Leslie see each other through at Sybil Brand every day. That picture can be very seductive. I hope you aren't fooling yourself."

I put my spoon down and picked up a butter knife to jam his toast with—or so I imagined.

He said, "I've invited you to lunch as a courtesy. I'm trying to help you here, not start any trouble. I know Jane and Max seem to think well of you."

The way he said it made my blood boil. Good thing I was still a bit

stoned from the joint I smoked on the way over.

"Has Leslie told you anything about this book business with Frank Andrews?" he asked.

Ah, now I thought—here comes the real reason for the free lunch. Glen pursed his lips. I looked away and noticed the expression Picasso gave Dora Maar looked very similar.

"Frank Andrews? Not really," I said. "I've heard his name mentioned, that's all. Something to do with the book *Prose and Cons*."

"I'm just telling you to be careful. You could find your feelings hurt. Leslie can be very charming, but she can be a tough cookie too."

I kept quiet.

Glen asked, "Has Leslie said anything to you about writing her book with Judy? What do you know about that?"

"Look, Glen. This is all very interesting, but none of my business. As far as Judy writing Leslie's book…I don't see how that's possible. It seems to me the only person who can write Leslie's book is Leslie."

Then, pushing my chair away from the table, I got up to leave. Glen said nothing, but I could see he was steaming. I turned to face him.

"I know you mean well and all that," I said, faintly. "Thanks for the caution or…whatever. I may be young, but I'm not stupid. Here's the thing though. Whatever you think…*I'm* not the one writing a book or publishing a newspaper story. That's not my thing. It's yours. Whatever you believe or imagine, I'm here as Leslie's friend…at her request. I leave in two weeks. Keep me posted."

"Rude bastard. Who do you think…" Glen started.

Only I sprinted out of earshot without taking a breath 'til I stepped on to Spring Street. All I could think of was how much my arrogance fueled my anger. It wasn't Glen I was mad at. It was myself.

Leslie called me that night from the county jailhouse. I told her what happened with Glen. She said she was weary from all of his intrigue plus all of this peripheral junk about coauthors, letters, lawyers and publishers. I gave her my side of the story which was, of course, hers to begin with.

"What're you doing now?" she asked, in need of cheering up.

"Day-dreaming about you and me naked," I teased.

"Liar. No, you're not."

"Writing you a letter…and reading. Just started Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. I'd been meaning to read it for years. And I've finished rereading *In Cold Blood*. Time to take notes. I found it on

Judy's bookshelves. She has a very respectable library, by the way. Can't wait for you to see it…naked."

"Peter, I started to write you a letter. But, when I got this one from you today, I thought I'd take a chance and just call. It's about Erich Fromm's theory of...what's the book called? *The Dogma of Christ*? I'm still unsure what it's about. Tell me."

"You said something in court about 'all of us girls *worshipped* Charlie.' It sounded so real it was shocking. I could feel the whole room tensing up. Something as simple as that...it goes to show how unaware you were at the time that what you were doing was wrong...or the consequences. To worship means strict observance to the rules and commands of your god."

"Manson liked to say how he was all about love...about how love is for everyone. But he sure put you down if you showed too much ego or doubt about him. So he used fear the way he used love. Oh, darn it…Honey, I got to go. Tell me more in your next letter. My time is up. But will I see you tomorrow?"

The next day, I went to see Leslie with her mom in the morning, and I saw her again from a distance on Monday when she testified in open court. I couldn't see her that evening though, because I had to pick Judy up from the airport. But, for the rest of the month of June at least, Les and I were able to keep up our regular routine of daily courtroom glances, phone calls, five- and six-page letters, and evening visits with Max every chance we could get.

I taught her some more about Eric Fromm. And we talked about how other monotheistic faiths, such as Judaism and Islam, each have their own versions of heaven and hell, god versus the devil, angels and demons in battle on the field of Armageddon, the mark of the beast tattooed on foreheads, blood sacrifice and a bottomless pit somewhere east of Eden. Leslie confirmed how this diminutive con man extraordinaire had covered the waterfront.

The last time I saw Leslie on that leg of my journey was on Tuesday, June 21st. I'd spent the afternoon at the Huntington Library with her mom. I remember Thomas Gainsborough's famous portrait of "The Blue Boy" in the picture gallery but, personally, could not see what all the fuss was about. However, just outside in the courtyard there was a wonderful bronze of a stag being gang-tackled by pack of wolves. That shocked my emotions but also captured my attention.

Jane and I held hands as we walked through the gardens and chatted. That calmed me down. This made me think about Leslie and

about the urge to help and protect her. Only how?

That evening in the conference room at Sybil Brand, Max, Leslie and I got to talking some more about whether or not the jury seemed to be getting the picture as to the potency of Manson's combined approach to music, religion and psychotropic drugs. Maybe not. I asked if the reason might be on account of too many dubious plotlines in their heads about "insanity pleas" from TV and the movies. Yes, I was still slightly stoned from blowing a doob earlier on with Les's brother, David, before I rode out to the jailhouse.

"You know," Leslie said, "I did get to say for the record how one time, while on LSD, I'd actually experienced my own crucifixion. I'm not sure they believed me or understood the experience I was talking about. But that was a turning point for me in terms of devotion to Manson."

I interrupted. "It's hard to believe how real an experience an acid trip can be unless you've been there yourself, but I thought you did a good job of describing the feeling."

Leslie continued. "Yeah well, it was a hard chargin' trip. I saw myself bleeding from both my hands, my feet and from right here just under my heart," she said, pointing to the exact spot. "Like all the blood was draining out of me, and I just kept seeing Charlie's face in front of me the whole time. My whole world became Charlie and the ecstasy I felt led me to him. I thought he was the holy spirit of Christ."

Leslie waited for my reaction, and I frowned.

"Hey, what's wrong?" she asked, sounding concerned for the way I looked.

Max got up to stretch his arms and legs for a minute.

"What? No...nothing," I said. "I was just thinking how much I hate leaving you in the middle of all this right now. The timing is wrong. I don't want to go back to Toronto. Not now...maybe never. Not unless you come with me."

"It's okay, honey," she said. "You know you need go back and finish what you had planned to do before I came along. It's important to you and me too. Of course I hope things will work out like we hope. Maybe it will and maybe it won't. Time will tell. But we need to be prepared if it doesn't."

The next day I packed up my things from Judy's—sweat suits mostly along with some borrowed books, stacks of letters, notebooks and shoes. I was sure to give Tricia Woodbridge a last call to say "Hello goodbye" again. Judy was out of town, so I made sure her car was

polished and topped off with fuel. I left a bouquet of flowers and a thank you card on the driver's seat.

I got a ride from Jennifer Frutig over to Jane Van Houten's place in Monterey Park. That's where I spent my last night in LA watching an old movie on TV—Audrey Hepburn and Albert Finney in *Two For the Road*. Jane and her neighboring best friend, Georgie, drove me out to the airport first thing in the morning. I had three empty seats all to myself on the way to Vancouver. By the time we landed in Toronto, just after nine o'clock, I had begun marking up Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* with my pencils.

I had also begun a letter to Leslie regarding Capote's account of Perry Smith and Richard Hickock, two savage young men who, in 1959, broke into a stranger's home in Holcomb, Kansas, and senselessly shot-gunned all four members of the Herb Clutter family without any obvious motive. There was nothing to rob. A false tip by a prison inmate led them to think there would be a safe filled with money. There wasn't. They could have just left without harming anyone.

The murders, wrote Truman Capote, were "a psychological accident, virtually an impersonal act. The victims might as well have been killed by lightning, except for one thing. They [each of the victims] had experienced prolonged terror, they had suffered."

That meant retribution. Towards the end of the book, the author reported on expert testimony suggesting this crime would never have happened except for a certain "frictional interplay between the perpetrators." In other words, *folie a deux*. Referencing expert psychiatry on the subject, Capote claimed that neither Perry Smith nor Dick Hickock would have, or could have, committed such barbarism all on his own. Not without the complex interplay of each other's personal madness. Maybe that's why Glen Peters was opposed to Leslie and me as a tag team beyond his control? Together, we might steer clear of his influence or moral duty, which is how I suspected he saw things.

Before going to bed that first night back in Toronto, I went for a walk in the dark and mailed my letter to Leslie. It included a full page of my handwriting the names "Leslie" and "Chiaramonte" to see how they looked and hear how they sounded. I told her that I wished I could honestly say it was good to be home, only it wasn't. It wasn't as though something was missing exactly. It just felt more as if I no longer belonged where I was. Time to move on—not here, not there,

not anywhere that I'd been already. It was time to go about finding my *terra nova* once and for all.

11

NO VERDICT IN DOUBLE MURDER

The end of June was a good time to be in Toronto. The ground was green and the cool air in the mornings was perfect for running. I spent my first week back home hanging around the track and Andy's office in Hart House. Like everyone else who knew Buck, I couldn't help thinking about how much I missed him. Carl Georgevski said he kept expecting him to show up for practice.

"I keep calling, but he doesn't answer."

On Monday, July 4th, I registered for two three-week summer courses at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) —"Program Planning" on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, and "Facilitating Adult Learning" in the afternoons. That was the best of the lot, so what could I do? Welcome to graduate school at Toronto. This one sucked. After I got back from the campus bookstore, there was a letter from UC Berkeley waiting for me, along with the one I'd been expecting from Leslie. As I requested, the regents in residence matters, University Hall, Berkeley forwarded catalogs and application forms for two graduate schools of education: Berkeley and Santa Barbara. After reading my mail and looking over the various program offerings at UC—I made a phone call to my landlady, giving her a month's notice.

Professor Bruce Kidd had been a prof of mine in the school of physical and health education the year before, and I'd worked for him on the Olympic Artists-Athletes Coalition. He and I used to run around Queen's Park once in a while in those days. Bruce had several regular

running routes all over the city. Although we preferred High Park or the Beaches boardwalk to running 'round in circles, Queen's Park had the virtue of being close by the campus. I could only stay with him for a very few laps, if he lightened his pace. After that, I would peel off to lift weights with Andy Higgins or Carl Georgevski. Some days, Bruce would be after a much longer run—in which case I might keep pace with him as far as the east end of Rosedale Valley Road. Then, I'd have to turn back while he carried on for another ten miles more of Crothers Wood parklands.

After our cool-down around the park, we went for lunch in the Great Hall at Hart House. Andy Higgins and Carl Georgevski were already there. I waved 'Hello' to my old Prof. Thomas Langdon, who was having lunch with Francis Sparshott and Marshall McLuhan.

When we sat down, Carl asked me, "What are you taking at OISE this summer?"

"Two of the most boring courses imaginable," I said. "We're reading Malcolm Knowles's theory of andragogy, and it's putting my feet to sleep. Same with Saul Alinsky. *Rules for Radicals* read better five years ago than it does today."

"It's called growing up," Higgins said. Kidd smiled in a way to suggest he agreed with Andy.

Bruce qualified this by saying, "If you weren't a socialist when you were twenty, you'd have no heart. If you aren't a capitalist by thirty, you..."

"You haven't any brains...yeah, I've heard that one before," Andy laughed.

"I'm not sure I'll go on with OISE this fall," I announced out of nowhere. "I've applied to Cal Berkeley and UCSB instead."

No comments right away—just strange looks of surprise. First at me and then at each other.

"And what will you do in the meantime?" Andy asked.

"First of all, I'm heading back to LA in a couple of weeks. I should get back in time for the end of the Van Houten trial."

Carl asked, "You don't honestly think she'll get off, do you?"

I wish I had nickel...

"She'll plea to a lesser charge when one is offered," I said. "Probably manslaughter or second-degree. She could be out in a year, maybe less."

I paused to chew my grilled cheese.

"You must be dreaming," Andy said.

I pointed out "She's already served nearly eight years in prison. Ain't that enough?"

Bruce said, “Some people think none of them will *ever* be let out of prison.”

“Some people think differently,” I responded.

“Hear him out,” Andy said.

Bruce continued, “You’ve told me before that Van Houten took part in a fight with this woman, Rosemary LaBianca, who ended up brutally murdered. Whatever her defense, you know the justice system’s penchant for punishing those who assist in a robbery-murder. The system’s designed to exact retribution if they can stick her for that.”

On that point, Bruce had agreement.

“But when is enough, enough?” I found myself often repeating.

* * *

In January 1970, at the urging of Leslie’s then-attorney Marvin Part, Judge Older appointed psychiatrist Dr. Blake Skrdla to make a confidential report on the psychotic state of mind of his client. When Manson caught wind of this action, he ordered Leslie to immediately fire her lawyer, thereby thwarting further inquiry into this matter. Once again, Charlie had regained full control.

Leslie dutifully requested that Marvin Part be relieved as her attorney. The court appointed Ira Reiner as her new counsel in his place. Only, this time, Mr. Part opposed the substitution, arguing that Leslie Van Houten was mentally incapable of making a rational decision.

“This girl will do anything that Charles Manson or any member of this so-called Manson Family says,” Part explained to the judge. “This girl has no will of her own left. Because of this hold that Charles Manson and the Family has over her, she doesn’t care whether she is tried together and gets the gas chamber, she just wants to be with the Family.”

Since the evidence against her was slight, Part *begged* the judge to hear the tape he made of an interview with Leslie.

“That girl,” he said, “is insane in a way that is almost science fiction.”

Justice Older responded he’d rather not hear the tape, so he never did. Max Keith told me he’d heard the tape and that it was “creepy” to listen to.

* * *

Saturday evening, Gabrielle called. She and Jean invited themselves over to my place. They brought high-potency "Columbian gold" marijuana like we hadn't seen much of before. Mostly, all we had was homegrown or Mexican pot, loaded with seeds and stems, but costing us next to nothing. *Oh, to be in Oleanna*. This shit was expensive. Fifty an ounce! As I recall, we got pretty hammered on Henkell Trocken sparkling wine also, after which Gabe decided she'd cut my hair. Twice. Once she messed up the first time, she tried again and messed it up worse. I accused her of doing this on purpose, but she denied it, of course.

Jean put on side one of David Bowie's album *Diamond Dogs*.

Exhaling blue-gray smoke from the bong he brought with him, Jean asked, "How will this lawyer of Leslie's…how will he get around the question of premeditation? You know…her decision to join this cult in the first place."

"Things were very different back then. At first, with the girls at least, Manson wasn't preaching violence and aggression. Mind control and Helter Skelter delusions take time to cultivate. Things have to emerge out of necessity. He used what he needed to keep them in line. It takes time to get rid of free will and break down the ego."

"Oh...come on, Peter," Gabe broke in. "How about just her willingness to get in the car in the first place, when she knew it would mean taking part in a murder? She knew what happened to Sharon Tate and the others."

I asked her, "Are we going to judge that now? This should be about how much *more* time she must serve, not what she was thinking when she was a teenager. Free will…what is that really? She's served her time in a prison when she should have been in a mental clinic instead."

Gabe shook her head.

I asked, "Did you read Bugliosi's account of the case? Even he promoted the 'robot' appraisal throughout his book, although it could be he didn't write it himself or never bothered to read it too carefully."

"We like to think free will is a cornerstone of society," Jean said. "We like to think we act by conscious choice at all times, but that may be an illusion."

"That's right," I said, turning to Gabrielle again. "And that's what Manson sought to destroy...conscious choice. So what I'm saying is that Leslie did not choose to murder those people. She was carrying out orders. As for what happened at the home of Sharon Tate...it seems to me Charlie Manson hoped, that by chopping up whoever was

in the house where Terry Melcher once lived, he'd be sending his friends a message. Either sign Charlie to a major record deal quick or be found in the same condition as Voytek Frykowski.

"Manson thought Melcher would make him a rock 'n roll star as big as The Byrds or The Beatles," I said.

Gabe turned to Jean and pronounced that they had to get going.

As my guests were leaving, Jean passed me an eighth of an ounce of his Columbian stash as a gift. I rolled some of it into a joint right away and started another dispatch to Leslie. In the background, the Diamond Dogs were howling, "making bullet-proof faces, Charlie Manson, Cassius Clay…"

The next night at 11:30 p.m., the telephone rang, and it was Leslie. She started by saying she was calling to tell me how much she missed me. I told her I felt the same way about her, and it was all true. I also told her about Jean and Gabrielle's visit. I was undoubtedly stoned when she called, feeling groovy.

"What did you talk about?" Leslie asked.

"We talked about shoring up one's ego instead of getting rid of it… living for the moment and all that jazz…But how was your day?" I asked. "What happened in court?"

"The usual. Typical Stevie Kay day. He's still tryin' to rile up the jury to hate me. Showing 'before' and 'after' pictures. Sharon Tate happy. Sharon Tate dead."

"You weren't even *there*."

"He did the same with pictures of the LaBiancas. Max objected, of course, but Kay kept bringing up all the stupid things I said at the first trial. Just crazy. Now he's acting like it was yesterday or something.

"Hey, how long will it take you to get here in your car?" she asked. "I liked the pictures of you and your 'darlin' MGB.' Looks like a lot of fun. Are you going to miss all of your friends? Will they hate me?"

"I'm missing you a lot more than anyone here will ever miss me. I have plenty of friends, but there's only one Lou-Lou. That's you!"

"You lie. I bet you have lots of girls," she teased.

"I've hung my skates up," I stated with certainty.

"I got a call from Judith on Sunday. One of the things we discussed was your living arrangements when you return. She said you could go on staying with her and Jennifer for as long as you need. She said for you to give her a call."

I called Judy right away, after Les and I had to hang up.

I told Judy, "Until things are settled with Leslie, it might take a few months before I find out if I've been accepted into graduate school. I hope that's all right with you?"

"Glen says he's disappointed you haven't applied to a school here in Los Angeles. Maybe Cal State LA? He knows people in the Cal State system. Why not let him help you out? He has a friend with good connections at Dominguez Hills. You have a better chance of getting in there than you do the University of California.

"Besides," Judy added, "don't you want Leslie to stay close to her family?"

"I'll send Glen my C.V. Thanks, Jude. That's a good idea."

"Glen said to include descriptions of the courses you've taken. He'll carry things forward from here. You can trust him."

Hmm.

Eventually, we got back to the subject of Leslie. Judy caught me up on what was happening in court.

"Same old courtroom rhetoric from Stephen Kay, of course," she said. "He's such a flake. On Thursday he said something like, 'Even Houdini or Clarence Darrow couldn't get Leslie off the hook for first-degree murder."

"Sounds like he's mixing his metaphors. Has Max gotten to his closing argument, or aren't we there yet?" I asked.

"Just beginning that now," Judy said. "You know Max. He's being his usual sensible, fatherly self. He told the jurors he doesn't expect them to acquit her of any wrongdoing. He's simply asked the jury not to punish her for any more serious crime than she's guilty of."

"What does he expect them to come back with?" I asked.

"Max conceded a lesser verdict of manslaughter would be in line with the doctrine of diminished capacity."

"How well was that received, do you think?"

"Nnnn…not sure if the jury can get the distinctions between murder and manslaughter, or premeditation *without* malice."

"Whoa. You're beginning to sound like a lawyer," I said.

"But it's their job to get it. We'll get Max to explain it to them," Judy said. "Things are wrapping up now. Max seems to think the jury will decide sometime this week or next. When are you coming back?"

On the 19th of July, a week before I set out for Los Angeles, a large envelope arrived from Judy. The letter was on Glen Peters' *Los Angeles Times* letterhead. It included a copy (dateline July 12, 1977) of an article by *Times*' staff writer, Kathleen Hendrix. The headline read: "**Van Houten Jurors Reach No Verdict in Double Murder**."

The piece opened with an overview of the sixties counterculture in terms: Flower children. Hippies. Pot. LSD. Tuning in. Turning on.

Dropping out. The Beatles. The Beach Boys. Guitars. Vans. Communes. Gurus. Mysticism. The breakup of the family. The sexual revolution. The turn against organized religion. Against the establishment. Race riots. The war in Vietnam. Alienation. Runaways. And beyond that, the Manson family looking for people to kill…

"It was all here in the courtroom of the 70s," Hendrix wrote, "A 'concatenation of events,' one defense witness, Dr. Lester Grinspoon, called it a linked chain of 'people, places and drugs which conspired to take this vulnerable girl and left her enmeshed in a system of delusional beliefs."

General details of Leslie Van Houten's life were catalogued: daddy's girl; twice homecoming princess in high school; an IQ in the top five percent of the nation; achievements in school government and so on. After her parents divorced, Leslie experimented with drugs, sex and counterculture. Who didn't? She and her boyfriend tripped out. Leslie lost interest in school. She got pregnant, and her mother arranged for an abortion. She briefly turned to Eastern religion for solace. She temporarily quit sex and drugs. She studied meditation. She even tried to become a Buddhist nun. But, after the breakup with her boyfriend, Leslie met Bobby Beausoleil, and he introduced her to Manson.

Hendrix described Deputy District Attorney Stephen Kay as "bandbox neat" with a "wearing nasal voice" and an expression that seldom changes. "He wears away at a witness with phrases like 'by the way…isn't it true' again and again. Kay is often sarcastic, and it does not seem natural to him. He describes Leslie Van Houten as coming to the courtroom 'all dolled up' and tells the jury that if they believe her testimony, 'I'll sell you the Brooklyn Bridge after the trial."

What a card.

According to the *Times*, Kay's most dramatic moment was when he passed the jury "before" and "after" photographs of all seven Tate-LaBianca victims—first presenting a live picture and then one of each of them dead.

"If psychiatrists made decisions in criminal cases," Kay added, "I'd be out of a job.'"

He was probably right about that. Apparently, when Maxwell Keith asked the jury to recognize the legal implications of Leslie's delusional mental state at the time of the murders "as a good soldier carrying out orders," Kay shouted out, "Was Sirhan Sirhan doing his duty as a good Arab killing Bobby Kennedy?

"To call them the LaBianca manslaughters would be a travesty of justice," Stephen Kay said in his closing. "When you go into that jury

room, you're not going to be alone. Society will be watching that jury room. So society will be watching you."

I'm not a lawyer, thank the gods, but even I know you can't say shit like that to the jury.

The judge had to contradict Kay's inflammatory statements and reminded the jurors of their obligation to judge Leslie Van Houten solely on the evidence presented in court—"regardless of what society as a whole thinks of this case." Judge Hinz ordered them to judge Leslie Van Houten as an individual and to base their decision on the evidence—and on that alone. Stephen Kay must've fretted he was losing the case because he was. Even he could see how both the public and members of the jury had come to see Leslie as she really was, not as he liked to portray her. His fibs were as phony as he was.

My last day of classes at OISE was on Tuesday, July 26th. I'd already loaded my teal blue '73 MGB the night before. There was only room enough in the boot and the jump seat for a few clothes, lots of books and my trusty Smith Corona Super 12 electric typewriter. Tuesday afternoon, I topped off the fluids, kicked the tires and said my goodbyes, headed west on Highway 401 for two hundred and fifty miles to the border at Windsor and Detroit. I stopped at the University of Windsor dorm where my buddy Mike Flynn was staying to to drop off half of my books. He was taking them back to my mother's place in Toronto for me, where I was storing the rest of my stuff. I left them behind because the extra weight was soaking up all of the MG's suspension.

As always, I was hassled by short-haired US Customs agents at the Ambassador Bridge. They granted me a six-month visa to check out graduate schools in California. I don't remember if I told them about my girlfriend or not. I spent that first night in a motel just off Interstate 94, somewhere outside of Chicago. The next morning, there were thin, high-level clouds on the eastern horizon that turned magnificent shades of oranges, yellows and blues when the light came up in my mirrors. I kept myself pointed west toward the sunset horizon with The Rolling Stones on my Sony tape deck playing it loud.

Pitching and plunging the car across summer hills and dry, open plains with the top down and Rolling Stones blaring, I was clear out of my head and hungry for substance and adventure.

12

DEATH OF A LADIES' MAN

The day I left Toronto was the same day Judge Hinz ordered the jury to begin deliberations all over again. They were to start on Monday, after an alternative juror replaced the one who became ill. The composition of the jury was now seven women and five men, only I didn't learn about this until later. I was in transit.

The next morning before sunrise, there were astounding saffron and tango blue skies that sparkled with stars in the heavens behind me. For almost an hour after dawn, I had these remarkable lightshows of pastel colors playing brightly in my rearview mirrors. Varying my speed between seventy and ninety mph—depending on traffic conditions and the threat of police patrols—I pretty much stuck to the fastest routes on interstate highways. I took I-80 west all the way through Illinois, then straight across Iowa into Nebraska. Each time I stopped for gas it took longer to wash and wipe beetle juice off the windshields than to fill the tanks and pans with gasoline, water and oil. The chrome bumpers and headlamps were all caked with bits and pieces of fresh and dried bugs. I just hoped not to hit anything larger.

At the Colorado state border, I took I-76 and set my bearing more to the southwest than before—better for tanning for one thing. Up until now, my right side was relatively pale by comparison with the left side of my face turning more dark pink than brown. After such a slow start in the morning and some carburetor problems lugging up the mountainside to Denver, I still made it through to I-70 past Vail and as far as Grand Junction, Colorado. The hotel I checked into was downtown near North Third Street and Main, two or three blocks from the Museum of the West. I checked in then jogged around the block just to loosen up.

The hotel had a busy bar, and, although I can't recall all the

details, I remember sharing pitchers of beer and big plates of nachos with two pretty, half-drunk girls and one of their boyfriends. I've forgotten just how we met, but I remember spending time in a cushioned four-person booth where someone had recently vomited. When I woke up the next day, I read this note scrawled in my diary: Met a girl named Sally. Pretty brunette, late teens. Shared a pitcher inside the Wild West Saloon. Shared a joint outside in her girlfriend's new Mazda GLC. Sally complained about the bar music and noise, and wanted me to hear her favorite band on her girlfriend's tape deck. Another of Sally's boyfriends showed up, and she got out to greet him. I stayed alone in their car until the Electric Light Orchestra finished playing "Telephone Line."

According to my highway journal notes "things very nearly got ugly." But after some pretty harsh words, I staggered up to my room and passed out to the tune of the air conditioner turned up to louder and loudest—so to cover the noise of the traffic and clowns. Woke up without a hangover, which was a blessing. I drew open the curtains right before sun up. I was glad for the foresight to eat a good early breakfast of steak and eggs with brown toast and honey. That final day on the road was the longest, hottest and hardest of the entire journey—eight hundred miles in eleven hours. It started out well enough though, thanks to the first of two joints Sally gave me as a gift for the road. I saved the last one for the plateaus and basins of Utah. The rest of the way, I stayed on I-15 south through Nevada and the wide-open vistas beyond. I throttled through Las Vegas, not even stopping for water, sensing the end of my journey was within reach if I kept pushing hard.

Although the landscape surrounding Las Vegas had its charms, I was unhappy to see a Nevada state highway patrolman creeping up in my mirrors. I slowed down way before he gave me the signal to pull over. Being Canadian, it's always a shock to be approached by a cop with his hand on a .357 Smith and Wesson in an open hip holster. I must have looked quite a sight, sunbaked by three days with the top down out there on the edge of the desert. Maybe the whole thing was a mirage? I expected the worst—I'd spend the night field-goal kicking crickets through the bars, see a judge in the morning, post bond through Western Union…and so on and so forth. Sunstroke will do that to a person. But, *deus ex machine*, the patrolman let me go with a warning to slow down, Ontario license plates and all. He must have thought I wasn't worth all the bother. I kept it down to seventy-five as far as the McCullough Pass. Then, just a mile from the state line with California, I opened her up.

Nearly burned out in the Mojave Desert. At one hundred miles an hour, the air feels like the blast from one of the furnaces they use in the brickyards. I completely scorched my arms and the entire left side of my head, never thinking to wear a hat or put the top up. All I wanted was a half decent tan, not to have my face fried. It was well after nightfall when I finally arrived at my destination—city lights, mazes of highway traffic, short and tall buildings, ballparks, and shopping mall clusters of oases and nightlights inside the Los Angeles city limits.

In spite of how thirsty, starving, hysterical, sun sick and half naked I was at the time, it was always a thrill to be back in The City of Angels. Running low on both fuel and carbohydrates, I got off the highway somewhere very near Cal State LA and gave Judy Frutig a call from a phone booth—munching on Cracker Jacks. She didn't pick up, so I left a message then called over to Jane Van Houten's place next. Jane invited me to crash at her place in Monterey Park, which I consented to gratefully. I was happy to see her after such a long haul in a small, open car with no one but my lonesome self to talk to.

As deadbeat and crippled as I was right before bed, I got up at dawn out of habit. Never one to sleep in very much, I would be sure to collapse sometime after I'd been to see Leslie, my love. Took a long hot and cold shower, shampooed twice and shaved. Flipped through the *Times*, made toast and brewed enough coffee for six thirsty people. Then, Jane and I drove in my car to Sybil Brand for a visit that morning with Les. Twenty minutes was all we were given. Leslie asked if there was something wrong, since I was so two-faced, wind bitten and worn tired. I didn't say much the whole time we were there, which was unlike me.

When Jane passed me the phone, all I could do at first was to whisper, "Obviously, I think this only goes to show you just how much of a fool I am for you girl." And there I was feeling shameless and obvious. "It's good to be home where the heart is."

One week later, on August 5th, after twenty-five days of deliberations, the jury in the Leslie Van Houten first-degree murder case reported to Judge Hinz that they were "hopelessly deadlocked." Five votes for manslaughter and seven for first-degree murder was the final tally. I was there when the judge declared a mistrial and set a September 12th hearing date to determine if and when Leslie would be put on trial yet again. One of the jurors, Alphonzo Miller, told reporters that although he agreed that Leslie was "believable," at first he was in favor of convicting her of first-degree murder. But, because of the

court's instructions on "reasonable doubt," he said, he changed his vote to second-degree. Alphonzo then changed his verdict again, this time to "manslaughter" on the final ballot. Alas, the story of a man gradually coming to his senses. That's what deliberation should be about. Rather than true, deliberate consensus, what we usually get is "groupthink" for the most part.

"It was impossible for us to unanimously decide on whether she actually was responsible for her actions," Miller said. "And I doubt if you will ever find a jury that could."

In fact, never before in California history had a hung jury in a first-degree murder case led to a further trial. Things were really beginning to look up for Leslie Van Houten. It was reasonable to expect a reduced sentence on a lesser charge. Fair, just and simple. That's what I thought.

I was at Jane's, hanging out with Betsy, David and Shannon Van Houten, when a very excited Leslie called the house in response to the news. People lined up to say "Congratulations." Everyone seemed to think Leslie was a giant step closer to being free after eight years in prison.

Max Keith told the press how delighted he was with this result. "When we started, most of the people I talked to didn't think she had a chance, and...so, I think what happened is a good outcome."

Leslie said that she was pleased but also exhausted.

That weekend Jane's place on Sefton Avenue was frantic with telephone calls. Well-wishing visitors came by the house by the dozens. It was really nice—sounds cliché—only it really was nice. There were lots of snacks, wine store pick-up and speculative chatter about Leslie's impending freedom. I don't recall what time it was on Saturday night when Max finally showed up with three more bottles of Mumm's. The first toast was "To a most deserving and humble gentleman, Maxwell S. Keith." There would have been more toasts only he left soon after that. Max said he needed time to prepare for his meeting the next week with District Attorney John Van de Kamp.

"There might be a realistic chance," he said, "for some sort of reduced sentencing deal."

Even the guards at Sybil Brand, who'd heard about the hung jury, were more noticeably friendly towards Leslie than before. Instead of the usual twenty-minute morning visit, that next day (on Sunday) was the first time deputies left us alone from eight until nine in the morning.

A tired looking Leslie said, "No use trying to guess what will happen next. Not at this point. We'll know more once Max sits down

with the DA."

"Don't worry, Les," I said. "They won't gamble the cost and bad press of another trial. That would be senseless and stupid."

Then again…

"Okay, let's talk about something else honey, please," Leslie said. "What are you up to? Did you get my card? What's in the news besides me?"

"Wha...no. Yes. Ah, compared with you? Nothing of interest. My lifestyle's blushing bourgeois at the moment. Besides thinking about you, my days consist of long leisurely runs around Griffith Park and reading Charles Bukowski. Soon you can join me. I'm sure we'll find better things to do than just hang around in the hot tub."

"Oh yeah, such as what? Speak for yourself, mister. I could sure do with a hot tub right about now." She seemed to pause to soak in the notion. "Judy is coming to visit tomorrow. She called mom. She's been away...Judy has, you know...I keep forgetting you live there!"

"Yes, I do know," I said, and then I paused before switching topics. "Did she tell you the news about Roman Polanski? No? Well, there's a deal being struck where he can plead guilty to unlawful intercourse with a minor, and, if he does, the more severe charges could be dropped. The girl and her parents don't want a trial. They don't want Polanski imprisoned. All they've asked for is an admission of guilt...and for him just to say that he's sorry. He will still need to go through the whole rigmarole and be examined by squads of consulting psychiatrists."

"Oh boy," Leslie said, a look of weariness in her eyes. "That's something I could easily have gotten along well without."

Neither of us said anything more right away. For once in a long time, I sat quiet and just watched and listened.

"I dreamed all last night of you and me," Leslie said. "And you were teasing me about being so skinny. You were thumpin' your chest and acting so strong. We had a lot of fun pinching each other...you can imagine. It felt so good to be kissed and gently touched by you. When I woke up, I wanted to go on dreaming, but the noise in this place is too much to sleep through.

"Peter, I think since you and me have come together I look more alive. I believe it's true. I was tripping on the changes I feel. One thing I noticed is that I am a lot calmer...not with regard to the case...that's intense. But I'm more settled in my inner-life thoughts. I feel pretty and wanted because of the way you make me feel."

"Are you kidding?" I said, "You're absolutely incredible. Not to mention fall-down, knee-buckling gorgeous. It's not just the way that

you look at the world around you that pleases. That 's what 'good-looking' really means." I said this glancing around at the bars, guards and inmates. "What a place in which to go about falling in love."

"Tell me something special and soft before you go...so when I close my eyes later on I can put these jailhouse vibes out of my mind. How 'bout a Beatles song?"

"John, George or Paul?"

"John." I roughly mangled the first six lines of verse to "Because."

When I drove back down the hill that night away from the Sybil Brand Institute, I punched in a far less romantic song on the tape deck from *Death of a Ladies' Man*. Rumor was that record producer Phil Spector held Leonard Cohen captive at gunpoint in his house the night they recorded those songs. In my letter to Leslie later that night, I tried to confirm the same feelings contained in Cohen's anecdote.

13

AU PAYS DE COCAINE

The night before his first post-mistrial meeting with Los Angeles District Attorney John Van de Kamp, Max Keith invited Judy Frutig and me to dinner with four other guests at the Valley Hunt Club near Pasadena. The Hunt Club was a century-old social club rooted in blue blood, gold stock and old-fashioned manners. Judy went with Max, and I drove my own car. When I got there, the maître d wouldn't admit me into the dining room—not without a jacket and tie. Max had a suitcase of "emergency courtroom supplies" in the trunk of his car. So I slipped on a necktie and put on a new white shirt with sleeves that were too long. The blazer, I got from the coatroom. No one other than the daughter of Max's friends, Lisa, noticed that I had no socks on inside my loafers.

We were seated outside on the patio. Max seemed in high spirits right from the start. It was great to see him in such a good mood for a change. I paid little attention to the others at our table, except Lisa, of course. Besides being blonde, there was something intriguing about her. She was a pretty, ingenuous, sad-looking young woman I guessed to be somewhere mid-way in her twenties. There was also something audacious and daring about her, which caused me to wonder what I found so attractive in women who were a touch reckless and wild.

Mid-way through dinner someone asked Max, "What're you expecting to get out of that tight-ass Van de Kamp, Max?"

"Plea to a lesser charge. Leslie's time served is already longer than the average in this state for second-degree murder."

Someone, not me, responded that in this case there wasn't much "average" about it.

"Yes," Judy agreed, "but neither is a split decision. This last trial cost the state more than a quarter of a million dollars, and what did it

prove? Half the jurors agreed she was guilty of manslaughter, not murder."

No one present seemed to hold any doubt. Nor had anyone much more to add on the subject of Leslie Van Houten that evening. Subjects changed by the second and depended a lot on the number of glasses of dark violet wine we consumed. I had a pretty good time up to that point, despite the stiff shirt and mosquitos biting me on the ankles.

Around nine-thirty or ten, Lisa asked me if I would give her a ride home. I asked her father—through Max of course—if it was all right with him. We'd all been drinking, but I assured them I wasn't suffering from "diminished capacity." Everyone laughed except Judy, who shot me a look of doubt. But Max assured Lisa's dad it would be all right to trust me. Judy said she'd see me later.

"Good night and good luck."

Outside by the sculpted hedges surrounding the parking lot, Lisa and I sat and chatted while my modest 1.8-liter roadster warmed up.

"Do you want to get high?" she asked me, very nonchalantly. In those days, it wasn't an uncommon presumption to make about someone my age with a mane, even at places like the Valley Hunt Club.

I said, "Of course. But I don't have anything with me."

"I have a friend who can get us whatever we want. Do you know how to find your way to Echo Park?"

I wasn't sure, but I wouldn't admit this.

"Do you mind if we stop at my place first? I'd like to get some cash to score an ounce if your friend has any good grass to spare. I'd also like to change out of this shirt."

She said, "Do it now."

You had to love the way that she said it. But I'd learned the hard way before—girls say a lot of things, don't they?

After a quick stop at the condo for a further change of wardrobe (two UCLA sweatshirts and blue jeans), we wound our way back along Echo Park Avenue to a house near the top of Park Drive. That's where Lisa told me to stop the car. There was a rock and sand garden with a path leading to the side entrance of a beige stucco house where her friend lived. I could hear music inside and sirens far off in the distance. The lone occupant took his time answering the door, but, when he did, he sure smiled at Lisa. He and I exchanged looks of suspicion, which I thought a prudent response.

Lisa's friend Lynn was a tall skinny guy with a black ponytail tied tight with a postman's elastic. He reminded me of a cross between

Geddy Lee (the lead singer in Rush) and the comic book character Ol' Injun Joe in *Tom Sawyer*. Inside the house, the main living space was cluttered with predictable drug paraphernalia. There were plenty of pipes, candles and grinders lying about on the tables. Other than that, it was a plain, empty space with one stupendous exception. In what would normally be called a "living room" hung a mattress on a plywood slab that was bolted with chains to beams in the ceiling. The whole contraption swung like a hammock four feet off the floor. There were also stereo speakers hung in a similar fashion from each of the room's corners. That was something I hadn't seen before.

Lisa told Lynn that I needed to pick up an ounce of pot and that we were in a hurry. I thought that was brusque. He took out his scales from a cupboard inside the kitchen and left for another room down the hall. A minute later he was back carrying a mustard jar full of golden brown bud in one hand and a box of plastic bags in the other. He weighed out an ounce of marijuana and asked me for fifty bucks. I offered to roll us a joint if he had some papers, but Lynn said not to bother.

He turned back around and passed me a glass water pipe with the bowl already loaded. I passed this to Lisa, but she waved it back. Handing me her lighter, she said, "You go ahead. Lynn knows what I want." Lynn gave her a nod. I hit the pipe and offered it back to him. He signaled for me to relax, which was easy. Although still buzzed from wine at dinner, I thought this was a complementary high and began to settle back and take in the scenery.

Lisa got up off the sofa and put a Tom Petty disc on the table. Then I watched her follow Lynn down the hall and heard them go into one of the washrooms. That left me alone getting high with the quadraphonic sound of the Heartbreakers playing. I had faint premonitions of excitement and trouble to go with the traces of petroleum ether that suddenly breezed in the air.

Lisa and Lynn came back into the living room before the end of side one. This time, Lynn was carrying a plate of something that looked like a polished slab of Petrified Forest. He laid the slate flat on the table in front of where Lisa and I had been seated together. From his hip pocket he took out an amber vial and knocked some rock and powder into a metal grinder. After a dozen turns of the crank, Lynn unscrewed the bottom and tapped out the fluffy pinkish-white powder onto the plate. Then, with a carpenter's blade, he drew out six long, thick, parallel lines of cocaine hydrochloride.

In the meantime, Lisa rolled a twenty-dollar bill she'd taken out from her cross-body wallet. She drew each of two lines up her nostrils,

one right after the other. Ladies first. Then Lynn signaled to me it was my turn. Lisa passed me her straw.

"Peruvian flake," Lynn announced, gesturing toward the glittering ridges of crystals. First, I turned to watch Lisa sink back into the cushions. She was smiling, and her eyes glistened brightly. Once I drew the lines up into my bloodstream, it took a moment for the drug to breach the brain barrier. The sense I had then was of blowing myself into thousands of pieces. It was a far more full-on, whole-body rush than I could have expected. Never before had I experienced anything so prime or so sudden—nothing so pared to the bone.

Just as I began to regain some semblance of conscious control of my senses, my conscience besieged me with ruinous thoughts. Floodgates of passion gave way to panic. What will Leslie or Max's friends think when they hear of this night's misadventures? Depends on what happens next, I supposed.

For the second time in ten or fifteen minutes, Lisa stood up and followed Lynn down the hall. I heard the far-way ringing of water pipes and the echoes of voices. When they came back a few minutes later, I could see that some form of seduction protocol had begun. Lynn held her close for a kiss, and I couldn't blame him for trying. I pretended to pay no attention at first, but, in a way, I was grateful for the chance to get away clean and leave Lisa to her friend's care—such as it was. But what happened next came as no real surprise. I watched Lynn piece her off with a gram she tucked away in her wallet.

Then, Lisa turned towards me and announced, "It's time for us to be leaving. Ready?"

Yes I was, especially now since I knew she was holding. Seems we both had what we came for.

Reaching out for the crook at her elbow, Lynn pulled Lisa back for another kiss. When he finally released her, I heard her say, "Your kisses taste bitter with coca."

Hearing this as encouragement, Lynn tried once again to embrace her.

This time, all she said was, "Please Lynn, let me go."

And he did right away. Saved me having to whack him.

"Buenos noches, Injun Joe," I said as we left in a hurry.

Following Lisa's directions, I took the Hollywood Freeway north to Ventura Highway headed west. My trip odometer already had fifty miles on it by the time Lisa told me to turn south on to Topanga Canyon Boulevard. I knew from the maps in the pages of *Helter Skelter* that we were only a few miles in either direction from the old Spahn Ranch site and Gary Hinman's house.

“You’re going too fast…you’re going to miss it!” Lisa shouted into the wind that tangled her wispy blonde hair.

She was right, of course. I should have slowed to a stop and turned about instead of trying to hold tight in the corner. The back end broke loose, and my rear wheel spun on to a side bank of gravel. We didn’t hit anything, but we came pretty close to a tall mountain pine near the end of her driveway.

I turned off the engine, and we walked arm-in-arm up the steps of the grassy embankment leading to Lisa’s house. Once inside the front hall, she turned on the light. I could see from our mirrored reflections just how much we’d each taken on a pasty-like pallor. Lisa drew out a few fat lines for herself and two for me on a mirror. I didn’t like the look of myself up the nose. Right after the cocaine rush plateaued a bit in my bloodstream—like the gentleman I was—I said my goodnights to the lady.

Lisa thanked me for the ride with a cutesy peck on the lips, and I stumbled down the black path to my car. I drove two and a half miles back up Topanga Canyon Road and parked at the foot of the hill below number nine-sixty-four, Gary Hinman’s old address and the place where he died. I did this all on the spur of the moment without premeditation. It was dark all around, and the only ghosts on the prowl were my own demons. When the coke started wearing off, I thought about heading back to Lisa’s to pick up my sweatshirt.

After a prolonged scalding shower first thing in the morning, I had coffee with Judy on the balcony at Micheltorena. We went together to visit Leslie from eight until nine. As far as we knew, there was nothing happening on the plea-bargain front. Max was still meeting with the district attorney. We didn’t discuss much of anything else. I kept quiet about my time spent with Lisa. On the way back to her place, Judy asked whether I’d made contact yet with Glen Peters’ friend at Cal State Dominguez Hills. I told her I hadn’t. She also asked about my night out with Lisa. I left out the part about Echo Park and my visit to Hinman’s.

When she called later, I didn’t tell Leslie that part about Hinman either, but I did mention everything else. I was compelled to be brutally honest and begged for her forgiveness.

“No, nothing happened,” I said over the phone. “Just some negligent, semi-anaesthetized driving unbecoming someone who should’ve known better. No sweat. I got the girl home safely before midnight, Cinderella.”

I promised Les I'd play it safer from now on, subject to the whims of the gods or rules of good conscience.

"I could tell something was up with Jude," Leslie said. "I think she could be jealous."

"Of what? Not a chance. She's always uptight about something. It comes with her self-righteous religion."

Just as I put the phone on its cradle and was about to walk down to Sunset Boulevard and take in the local sights, Max and Judy came through the front door of the condo.

"Hey, Max, what's up? How did things go with Van de Kamp?"

I was curious to hear of this meeting.

"Nothing to shout about." Max said, looking tired and disappointed. "I was just saying to Judy how I hoped he'd have more to say than he did."

"Can I get you a drink?" Judy asked him while starting to fix him bourbon and water.

"Don't you think Van de Kamp's made his decision yet?" Judy asked.

"Impossible to say," Max sighed, taking a seat at the dining room table.

"I heard what Stephen Kay had to say to the press," she said. "He's claiming the last jury followed their emotions instead of the law."

I laughed. "What's he trying to say? That it wasn't his fault?"

"Emotions, hah," Max snorted. "This coming from the guy who fixated the jury on the most gruesome pictures of the crime scenes imaginable, including those he knows Leslie never laid eyes on."

"Do you mind if I go with Max tonight to see Leslie?" Judy asked me.

"That's fine with me," I said. "I just got off the phone with her when you stepped in. She'll be anxious to hear about Van de Kamp."

I excused myself and went for the walk I had planned along Sunset. When I got back, Judy and Max were gone. So I rolled a couple of joints from the stuff I got from Lynn. I put on Marc Bolan's *Tanx* pretty loud and sat on the balcony writing notes for a letter to Leslie.

Ever since Judge Hinz declared a mistrial in August 1977, more people than ever were interested in visiting Leslie Van Houten. There's no denying I felt the pangs of a general wariness stirring. At first, I felt obliged to stay away to make time for the old guard who knew Leslie longer than I did. There were some of her old friends that I became

close with, though sometimes I begrudged them the time lost with my girl. Among those I got along best with was one of Les's college teachers from when she was in state prison at Frontera, Professor Michael Malone.

Michael had been an adjunct to several English departments in City College and prison programs when he met Leslie in the mid-seventies. He looked to me like a grey-haired, fifty-something Richard Burton, and his wife, Jane, had a kind of Liz Taylor thing going as well. Leslie said that Michael was her favorite teacher. So, if for no other reason, I accepted the Malones' invitation to spend a week at their home on a hill near the coast of Laguna Nigel, fifty miles south of Los Angeles. Les had their number and called us every evening. I wished I could have stayed with them longer, but I promised to be back to LA to meet with Mr. Glen Peters.

The Lawry's Center was on the historic site of the old spice packing plant northeast of Los Angeles Dodger Stadium. The center had several lush flower gardens, water fountains and a hacienda-style restaurant only minutes away from downtown LA. It so happens that District Attorney John Van de Kamp's grandfather, Walter, was one of the original Van de Kamp's Bakeries and Lawry's Restaurants founders. Small café, eh? Glen arrived before me and pretended to be friendly for the first ten minutes I got there. But I could see his shoulders starting to tighten when I ignored him to chat with tourists at the next table, who said they were on vacation from their government jobs in Montreal.

"Judy tells me you and she were at dinner with Maxwell Keith at the Hunt Club...that you were drinking and driving."

"Is that what she said?" I asked calmly.

"She said you were drunk when you left the restaurant with a guest's daughter."

"What's all the fuss about, Glen? I know it's rude to say this, but who appointed you guardian of everyone's business? I wasn't the only one who had wine with dinner."

"She said you'd all had a lot to drink. That's not the point."

"Then why bring it up?"

No reply for a second.

"I'm concerned with what I see as your self-destructive nature, Peter. I'm worried for Leslie's sake. You two are like moths drawn to a fire. You're gonna get burned, let me tell you."

I frowned as he said it, but stopped short of growling.

"Aren't you concerned where all this could be leading?"

"What would you know about it?"

Glen suddenly blinked in rapid succession. "I know you take too many chances. You've admitted as much to Judy."

"Have I? You do or don't approve, which is it?"

"What if Leslie were to get out of prison a year from now? Will you still be around then looking for trouble?"

"Look, Glen. What happens *then* will be up to Leslie."

I started speed-eating my tortilla casserole to keep my tongue tied. I decided that moment I'd had enough of Glen Peters. The feeling was mutual. No need to shout about it.

"Look at me, will you? Would you try and take her away from her friends and her family? Is that the plan?" he persisted.

I wanted to sock him right in the guacamole.

"My plans are my own to decide. The same goes for Leslie."

"What happened at Dominguez Hills? Did you see Brad like I told you?" Glen asked.

"Forget that," I said. "Please tell your pal, Brad, thanks all the same, but I've decided to apply elsewhere for grad school."

Folding my table napkin, I added, "I've got to get going, Glen. Why do we always part the same way? Thanks awfully for lunch. I hope you'll excuse me."

I tossed the napkin on my chair and turned away.

"Which 'elsewhere' might you be going to, might I ask? Back to Toronto?"

He only *wished*.

"UC Santa Barbara," I said, glancing back nonchalantly over my shoulder.

"Good luck getting in *there*," Glen said with a simper.

I couldn't hear what more he said after that since I was halfway out the door when he said it. To myself I put it this way: We have to stop meeting and parting this way. Adrenaline clouded my judgment. When I finally found my car, I drove off right away without warming her up. I didn't get high until later. That's when I sobered up.

Leslie's siblings, David and Betsy, had first dibs on the next morning's visit to see their sister at Sybil Brand. I met up with them later for lunch at their mother Jane's house. After that, I gave Betsy a lift back to her apartment in Hermosa Beach. It was a fair-size three-bedroom second-floor flat close to the ocean, near the corner of 34th Street and Palm. I stayed a couple of hours that afternoon while Betsy unpacked

some of her moving boxes. In exchange for my help, Betsy shared the secret to her sensational coffees. She had one of those steam-lever Gaggias and used to top off her lattés with shaved chocolate and sugar crystals that dissolved in the foam. I wrote to Leslie to say we'd need to get one like it for our place soon enough.

That evening, Betsy and I went with her roommate, Sara's boyfriend, to a Hollywood cinema to see Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, starring Robert de Niro. What impressed me more than the bloody ending everyone was raving about was how creatively the end of the film strange-looped back to the beginning. I remember afterwards reading screenwriter Paul Schrader's remark that the last frame of the film could be spliced to the first and the movie started all over. I wrote to Leslie suggesting she might find it worth exploring the way writers use this structure as a narrative form, much like the way surrealist Julio Cortázar did with his novel *Hopscotch*. I promised to hunt down a copy and send her my notes.

Betsy Van Houten called the next day and asked if I still wanted to move out of Judy's. I'd spoken with her about this before. She said I could stay at 122 34th Street in Hermosa Beach and share the apartment with her and her roommate Sara—at least until things sorted themselves out with her sister. Later that evening, I drove over to Sybil Brand with Max Keith to tell Leslie the news. We only had forty-five minutes to talk, so I promised to relay the rest of my thoughts when I had time to write it all down in a letter.

August 23rd, 1977, was Leslie Van Houten's twenty-eighth birthday. A beautiful young woman coming into the prime of her life. Human rights activist Karlene Faith (who Leslie met while in prison) was in town and took my usual 8:00 a.m. slot at the jailhouse. Betsy Van Houten and I spent the morning walking the beach, talking and taking pictures to send to her sister. Once the pictures were developed, I put the best of the lot in with what I would soon regard as a most embarrassing letter, some of which read in part:

> *No offense against Jude as a writer. I'm in no position to judge her reports. I've read her pieces about you in the Monitor, and I believe that you are the more daring writer. Why don't you try writing it yourself? Or do you feel you need her for just talking to? Just remember: Judy spent the sixties in bible camp. She's curious about the counterculture but never took part. From what she tells me, she went to some sort of Christian Science prep school while you and I*

were in search of mind-exploring adventures. If she and Glen want to publish a series of 'have faith in God' stories about you for their congregation that's one thing. But a biography of Leslie Van Houten can only be written by you. No one but you. That's whose voice people need to hear, not some story 'as told to a reporter.'

Hey, you know what Mark Twain had to say about Christian Science? He said that Mary Baker Eddy was head of a 'greed-infested tribe of superstitious buffoons.' He said not a single material thing in the world is conceded by them to be real, except the all-mighty dollar. 'Long live the Prince and the Pauper.'

* * *

No one hates moving as much as I do, and no one has moved more times than I have—my everlasting curse. David Van Houten and I took his boss Milo's van to Micheltorena Street, first thing in the morning, to fetch the last of my things from Judy's apartment. I had everything already packed and ready to go. Judy and her sister Jenn were both away, so there was nobody there to say goodbye to. I left a note thanking them for my stay and said I'd call them later from Betsy's. When I called later that evening, Judy said she was surprised to find some of my personal papers left behind on the balcony. She also said her neighbor handed her a letter addressed to me that was put by mistake in his mailbox. Plus, he wanted his weights back. She wasn't specific, but said she had something important to tell me and asked if I would come over.

An hour later when I got there, it was obvious that Judy was red-faced and upset about something. So after the cold but customary salutations and prattle I asked her, "What's wrong?"

"Why don't you sit down, and I'll show you."

I sat on one of the stools beside the kitchen counter. and Jude handed me a legal pad with what were obviously my own notes. I took a quick look at the pages of notes and put them down on the counter.

Judy asked, "Would you care to explain this?"

Pushing the pad a few inches away on the countertop, I said, "What's there to explain?"

"Try explaining why you are telling Leslie not to write her book with me as coauthor. What business is it of yours to interfere with my job?"

"You're right," I admitted, "it's none of my business. What Leslie decides to do about her book is up to her, you, whomever. It has

nothing to do with me."

Judy said nothing, but I could see she was steaming. All I wanted was to escape from the scene.

"Yes," I said, as if I were talking to myself. "It was fainthearted of me to leave this laying around. I'm sorry you found it. I should have said what I thought of your project."

But the truth was I felt better now that she knew. Time heals all wounds, they say—or at least toughens the scars used to cover them over.

I told her to please tear up the pages and let's try to start over. She said she felt betrayed. Who could blame her? Yes, I was awful. Judy marched down the hall and shut the door to the bedroom behind her. I tore up the pages myself and tossed all but one into the trash bin. I kept some of the pieces. Stepping outside to where my MG was parked, I had the feeling that some invisible tax had been lifted. I was in a much better mood when I got back to Hermosa Beach and stayed that way for days while exploring this modish district.

The next time I heard from Judy Frutig was on Wednesday afternoon, August 31st. She called Betsy's apartment with breaking news concerning the DA John Van de Kamp's resolve in the case.

"I've just spoken with Max," Judy said. "Van de Kamp's office just announced their decision to prosecute Leslie a third time for first-degree murder."

14

PROSE AND CONS

Leslie returned to court September 12th, when the judge set the new trial date for January 16th, 1978. She was in court again on Monday the 19th of September for a bail hearing. The jailhouse door wasn't open yet. Bail was set at $200,000. Family and friends (including my own) began working behind the scenes, canvassing those we thought could help us raise the fee for securing her freedom.

Another month after that, Richard C. Paddock wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* about District Attorney John Van de Kamp's decision to retry the case. The headline read "**Third Leslie Van Houten Trial Scheduled for Jan. 16: Smiling Cheerfully, Former Manson Cultist Waives Her Right to Go to Court Within Next 10 Days**."

I found it noteworthy of Paddock to point out that "If Miss Van Houten had been allowed to plead guilty to a charge of second-degree murder, she would have been eligible for parole almost immediately." And that, "the LaBiancas apparently were selected as targets at random by Manson."

Perhaps I was reading too much into these facts, but it led me to feel more confident in Max Keith's defense strategy. I wasn't so sure of the law. If the LaBiancas had been selected at random by Manson, and if an experienced con such as he was in *total control* of his cult, then how could a brainwashed, teenaged Leslie Van Houten be held entirely responsible for the part that she played? She couldn't. Could she? Whatever crime she committed, it couldn't be *first-degree* murder. Given the facts, that charge wouldn't hold—at least that's what we thought.

At this point, Leslie did not stand convicted of any crime whatsoever. Even her prosecutors were of the opinion that, of all the

former Manson Family defendants in this case, she was seen as the one most eligible for release on parole.

I knew it was important for Leslie to see her supporters in person, so I made time for visitors to take my place near the head of the line. My personal deprivation was offset by the fact that Les would call me during the evenings.

We discussed her prospects with the new trial in three or four months. It seemed to us that, ever since Leslie's admissibility for bail, a more liberal sentiment began to appear in the press. This indicated to us that we might be headed in the right direction. Actually, getting her free on bail seemed like the next inevitable step toward gaining her freedom. To turn the key in that lock, all we needed right away was twenty percent and a valiant bondsman willing to help bail her out.

* * *

Most autumn mornings, if I wasn't visiting Leslie, I'd spend my time either reading on Betsy's couch, writing notes in my diaries or composing letters home and abroad. Once or twice a week, I'd help David out with his job at Milo's. I ran on the beach and lifted weights by the pier. I even went sprinting and bounding on the grass in Cypress Park. Most evenings, Betsy and I would either eat out at some place on the beach or at home. Or else we'd ride over to her mum's place in Monterey Park and chow down with the rest of the family.

One night, after Glen and Doris Peters had already left, Jane introduced me to Leslie's father, Paul, her brother, Paul Jr., and his wife, Marge. Judy was also there but left to have dinner with Max somewhere else after cocktails. I'm certain I didn't make much of an impression on Les's dad and older brother. And, to be honest, it didn't matter that much to me. Girlfriends' fathers and older brothers always made me feel restless, and the suffering was no doubt reciprocal.

The next morning, I was back in line with the rest of the lonely hearts waiting to visit inmates at Sybil Brand County Jail. Leslie, at first, seemed to have something urgent to tell me. But it seemed to take her a while to sort herself out.

"Are Mom and Dad coming later on? I want to talk to them before I mail the letter I've written to Pete. I guess I need to get it together." ('Pete' was Leslie's nickname for Glen Peters.)

"What is it? What's wrong? What did you have to tell him?" I asked.

"Just to lay off. Let me claim my own personal space for a change.

Stop intruding into my affairs...that's for one thing. I'll write you about it later. Some of it was about you and me, of course. I don't want to waste any more time worrying about it. Honey, let's change the subject. Anything else going on out there in that big world of ours?"

"Just gossip. I think I told you that my friends Jean and Gabe are breaking up."

"Oh. Yeah, you predicted something like that in your letter. Well, the last letter I got *anyway."*

"It's no surprise...their breaking up, I mean. Just part of a general epidemic."

"Peter, I feel we've made a promise to one another. Haven't we? And now with that comes responsibilities. Please say you agree."

I nodded. "I guess. Please say what they are."

"All we decide to do from now on we should decide to do together...like with you and your schooling. I've been giving this a lot of thought. If you don't get accepted into Santa Barbara, you'll get in somewhere else, and we'll make it work regardless. I love you, and I am committed to you and you only. Once this damn trial is over and I'm out, I want to support you, and I want you to support me. Now, I have said it. Do you want it in writing? I'm committed to *us*, aren't you?"

"You bet," I said. "It matters to me that you want this."

"Now, I feel I can be completely open with you. I want to share my feelings. I couldn't always. In a sense...I haven't any secrets. Well, I do. What I mean is...a lot of what's been said or written about me just wasn't true. But I want you to know everything."

"Is this about your old boyfriends?" I asked. "Maybe I don't want to know. It will drive me crazy with jealous feelings I won't be able to get under control. I get angry just reading about..."

"It's because you are driven and want to protect me, but you can't. Because you want to defend me from my past, but you can't. So honey, please let me set your mind at ease. You asked me about Tex. I didn't have that many…what you would call 'boyfriends,' not compared to you and all the girlfriends you've told me about."

I cringed a bit thinking that over. What a strange way to try and impress a girl. I was a moron.

"Tex was a square kind of a guy. Nothing like you. I guess from things he told me about where he was from, I figured out that our high school pasts must have been similar. We got close that summer at Spahn.

"I had been hung up with the whole biker scene. I was getting a bit

freaked out by it too. Charlie picked up on it and suggested I not hang around that scene any more. And, about that same time, Tex asked me to help him do things around the ranch. So that's when we first got together."

"Such as? Come on, let's have it. What sorts of things did he need help with?"

"Nothing too special. Just ordinary things such as help him fix up the dune buggies and other stuff Charlie wanted done. Tex was always an up kind of guy. Sometimes, I felt very close to him. Not always though. I honestly thought then that I loved everyone, but I know now that wasn't true. It's like…I can't remember the guy but the one that wrote about the whole acid scene."

"Ken Kesey? You mean Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test*."

"Yeah, that's it. It was all detached like that. Love wasn't real...although sometimes I thought it was. For a while Tex was catatonic, and I was really concerned for him. I'll tell you more in my letter, I swear. Or, better yet, sometime soon when we won't be interrupted and censored. Let's not discuss it now or all of our time will be used up."

After a pause, I reflected, "Listen, Les, I don't want us messing this up. I can't help wanting you all to myself. Is that wrong?"

"We aren't going to mess this up, Peter. I feel the same way you do. Just please try not to get so rattled by what others say to rile you or get angered about stories you've read concerning my sordid past. You need to trust me and hear me out."

"What happened a decade ago isn't what gets to me, Leslie. It's the more recent junk about you and Frank Andrews writing books, making films, getting married…" I growled.

"Well, I told you how Pete got involved and how confused everything got after that..."

"I'm not talking about book deals or whatever...just the part where he went on national television to say that you and he were going to be married. Were you just leading him on? Doesn't bode well for me then, does it?"

After I made this last remark, everything stopped. The deputies started to rustle us up. Bad timing.

Our visit for that day was over. But it wasn't the best place to stop. All Leslie had time to say at the end was to repeat, "I'll write you about it, I promise. I'll go do it right away now."

And all there was left for me to do was to hang up the handset and jealously wait for her letter.

* * *

Here is part of what Leslie's letter had to say about Frank Andrews, the writer who announced to the world that he and Leslie Van Houten were going to be married when she got out of prison. Martin showed me the article.

Hi My Darling, My Honey, My Love!

Wow! I thought I'd already rapped Frank to you, but now I will tell you the whole situation. When we started to write, he was the first person other than Jean Carver on Death Row that I would write or speak to. Pete saw it as a way to draw me out. I saw it as, 'Why not? Nothing to lose.' He was fun to write with. I was full of opinions about people. My understanding had been cut off philosophically—so Frank's past being similar to Charlie's years inside prison all made it seem OK to write him. I was still messed up from before.

His letters were fun. Funny and clever. I didn't know much about people. We wrote letters all the time. He was bitter over his years in jail. He was from a different time. He missed the whole sixties scene. These differences at the time weren't important because we were both locked up and had that in common. I can't remember if we ever really discussed freedom or anything very deep.

As time went on, he asked if I'd marry him. I said I felt it was a bit premature. He got weird. I wanted the fun letters again. So I said 'yes.' He got out. I asked him not to say anything because it wasn't for the public. I encouraged him to find another love interest. Or whatever. Though I was saddened in knowing our letters would not be the same, I didn't want to hurt him and thought it would just die out over time. Marriage didn't mean anything to me. A piece of paper. Maybe because of mom and dad. I don't know. Also commune life. It seemed square. Dumb. Unnecessary. Only now, with you, and all you're teaching me about alternatives, have I come to realize the beauty in accepting this alternative for us.

Anyway—with Frank it was already off as far as I was concerned. Prose and Cons was coming out. The promotions were not supposed to exploit Pat's and my notoriety. He got out and went on a tour—part of which brought us together for a second meeting. That's when I became really uneasy. He told me he had let it slip, during one of his interviews to promote the anthology, supposedly, that he and I were going to be married. I got angry. But I never thought it would get out. So I wasn't all that forceful in opposing it. I couldn't deal with all the issues with Glen and all the rest of it. Also, I was new on the mainline and trying once again to become close to people—relate to other cons—find my place in the

prison life I was resigned to.

He did an article for the Times. It was supposed to be about the book of our letters, which had taken on a new form. At first they were going to be an exposé of two people in prison—through letters expressing the true conditions and the effects it has on people both physically and mentally. I was feeling confused by it all, so instead of dealing with it, I just kept saying 'yes yes yes' and not caring about any of it really. It became the Frank Andrews' project more than mine or 'ours.'

The thing is, those letters were good for its time. It could have been a good book. Anyway, in the article, Frank also went into all the money he'd make—then it got to the money I'd make. Ugly scene. I told him I was tired of him trying to speak for me. Only I didn't present myself forcefully enough. Then, when he returned to New York, our letters had already dwindled to not much. All he did was complain. No money for this or that. He lived above his means. All the women he slept with. We were not together in any respect.

At one point he called to say he had set up a TV thing with Barbara Walters. He insisted I had to tell him right then if I'd do it or not. I said I was hesitant. He said how great it would be for me. I'd have to show myself someday and on and on. Once again, I said 'yes' instead of 'no' (just like the shrinks told me—I really had a problem.) I told Pete on a visit and he freaked. Now I see it was because he hadn't made the decision for me. He always has to have such control. Now even mama was upset because of Pete. Boy, now that I write it all down, I can see how dumb I was. Also, Frank had said he would do me a couple of favors. He didn't. Anyway this was after Pete had stopped everything. No deal.

Then Frank went off about Pete. There was this big falling out. He also went into detail about how now he couldn't get enough money for this and that. That ended it for 'us.' I saw that I had become nothing more to him than an opportunity to make some money. Same old story. Just another con. He said it was so I could get F. Lee Bailey to defend me.

The last time I spoke with him on the phone, I politely asked about the woman he'd been living with since he got out. He played like there was a bad connection. That's it. That's the whole story complete. I know I was wrong now to have been so careless as to say 'yes,' because with you, I see how really special a marriage can be. You are my only man, curly head handsome.

I can only say, when you ask me how do I know it ends with

you? Every living bit of me knows it to be so. You are all my dreams come true at once and for always. A man who loves me for me. A man who wants to protect me and to teach me how to learn things for myself—not just what I've been told. To hold me close enough to be safe, but also let me adventure on my own. I want to discover my own way of being free the way you are. I want us to challenge each other the way Olympians spur each other on. Isn't that what you're always telling me about? What humans can be? That's what I want us to be. I love the thought of you and me together for life.

* * *

Martin Bijaux called and left a message at Betsy's. I called him back to say, yes, I did get a call from our friend, Jean Cousineau. Jean said he was coming to Los Angeles to visit Martin and me. Out of the blue, it appeared the two of them had put together a plan for a two-week road trip down the coast to Acapulco. What was the occasion for that I wondered? I opted out for obvious reasons.

When Jean arrived near the beginning of November, Martin and his new girlfriend threw a party at her place on North La Jolla Avenue. I invited Tricia Woodbridge to come along with me to meet them. Though Trish and I spent the afternoon together traveling around, talking, drinking in cafés and playing touch football with some guys and gals in the park, she bailed on the party. Still, it was fun to see her and spend time together after so long. She absolutely sparkled, and I resisted the urge to tell her how much. She asked me to pass along her best wishes to Leslie.

It was great seeing Jean again too, though that entire evening made me feel faintly homesick. I didn't feel like discussing his break-up with Gabrielle. I was too self-absorbed or focused on Leslie to be interested in anyone else's problems. I skirted away from the topic each time he mentioned it.

"So tell me, Jean," I asked at one point later on, "What's with this November get-away? Don't you have a job? Tired of the slush and slurry already? Winter hasn't even begun."

"I've been tutoring senior high school French. But then I got a much better offer in Ottawa. An elderly teacher passed away where my cousin's wife worked, and they knew the principal."

"So you got an interview right away and the job on the spot.Is that it?"

"The whole thing happened the week before Thanksgiving," Jean

said. “School starts the first week of January, so I decided to take this time off.”

“And all it cost him was his girlfriend,” Martin added.

“Here’s to a New Year and a new woman,” I toasted, without for a moment thinking about Gabrielle. We’d all moved on.

“Congratulations,” said Martin, filling everyone’s glass full again with a German Riesling that was humming with apples. “It’s always a pleasure to celebrate finding gainful employment. Unlike some of us.”

Did he mean me?

“Cheers!” we all applauded each other.

“And why Acapulco?” I asked. “What’s with that trip?”

Martin said, “I have to write a piece on the expansion of new entertainment resorts. Car company rental, hotel reservations and an expense account. I have my contacts in place, including a very good female photographer. They’re having the Miss Universe pageant there this summer and this is part of an early promotion campaign.”

“*And* an excuse for us going to Mexico,” said Jean. “I’ve never been there before.”

“And my missus wants me out of the house,” Martin said, “Right, babe?” he shouted to her in the kitchen.

All I heard in response was the sound of her washing the dishes.

Jean asked me, “And you, Pete…what are your plans? Any more news about Leslie?”

“No real news. Her new trial starts in January. We’re still begging bondsmen to please be kind and take our money. But so far no luck…”

“You sound surprised.” Martin cut me off. “It’s a risky venture all the same.”

“Leslie is hardly a risk,” I said. “Fuck, man. Taking a trip to Mexico with you two seems a lot dodgier.”

Jean asked, “How much do you need?”

“Ten percent of two hundred thousand dollars. That’s what we give the bondsman…twenty grand. That is, if we can find someone to put up the bond.”

I looked back at Martin, who was pouring himself another tumbler of Riesling.

I told them, “We’ll know more after Christmas.”

“Here’s to Leslie,” Martin toasted. “Best wishes for a New Year and good fortune.”

“Cheers!” we shouted in chorus.

“I’ve decided to go back home to Toronto for six months,” I announced. “Or at least until this trial is over…find work, if I can, until June. I’ll need to do something legal for money until I start grad

school next fall."

"Where are you planning on going?" Martin asked, passing the joint to his girlfriend who had reentered the room.

"Our first choice is Santa Barbara. I'm going up there to check things out before I leave town. A lot will depend on what happens when Leslie gets out, of course. But, for now, we've decided against hiding out in LA. If I can't get into UCSB, I may try other UC campuses...maybe Irvine or Santa Cruz. But we've got our hearts set on living in Isla Vista."

* * *

Friday, November 11th, and my MGB was back in the shop for a tune up. My plan was to leave the car at Leslie's mom's. I had to take a bus to Silver Lake and hitch a ride from there to Sybil Brand with Judy Frutig. She dropped me off and then left right away to make another appointment with bondsmen. I'll give her this, Judy was a diligent workhorse in that respect. She was better at talking to bankers than anyone else.

"Let's hope Santa Barbara comes through soon," Leslie said, during our visit. "So we can maybe start planning for when I get out. I know I can start work right away in Max's office. Or if you find a good job in Toronto...do you think they would let me into the country?"

"They will if we're married. If not, we stay here," I told her. "Besides, keep thinking *Santa Barbara*. I know that's what we both want. I got another letter from UCSB yesterday, I'll tell you about it later. It's no big deal. Just the office of student services asking for proof of my teaching credentials, previous student visas and marital status. Apparently, being married to a California girl has certain in-state advantages I wasn't aware of."

"In-state? That's funny. It means something different to me," Leslie said. "Honey, just try to continue your studies and keep training hard for the future. You'll feel better with more important stuff to do. Believe me, I know what a bore the courtroom scene can get to be. It's all about preparation. Isn't that what you're always telling me? Try and concentrate on...what did you call it? 'The Science of Living.'"

"That's right. Alfred Adler, 1929," I said.

Leslie bowed gently, "Concentrate on three things, philosophy, training and me...but not in that order. I can make money when I'm out. I may be a bit rusty, but we'll manage somehow. Don't worry so much.

"Know what?" Leslie continued, "I've been thinking. I've been

thinking about what our first place should be like. Want to hear? It should be small and modest. Little compartments with one large room for gathering…"

"A library!" I enthused, getting with the mood of her vision.

"Right. And a small earth space beside the kitchen, where I can grow herbs and flowers. It will be cool."

"I want my own bedroom," I said.

"Not a chance."

"Then how about my own closet?"

"Stop. Listen, if it turns out that bail is beyond our reach…which half the time it seems it is, and half the time not…all this still counts as far as state time anyway. I hate thinking about it this way, but we have to be realistic. It might still take a year or more," Leslie said, looking distracted.

Whereas she seemed all lit up only moments before, now she suddenly turned somber and sad.

"Before you, I was alone," she said. "I was looking…not even knowing how mixed up I was about so many things. You've given me a reason to be all I can for you and for us."

"Us? Thanks by the way," I interjected, "for explaining some of that business with Frank Earl Andrews, the venerable author. And Tex. But is that all? Are you telling me everything?

"I told you my buddy, Martin, heard the rumor about your getting married and told me about it. Tell me, what should I have said to him in response?" I asked, raising my voice.

"Please don't be so angry. I'm sorry now that those letters with Frank are coming out," Leslie bristled. "I guess I knew they would eventually. All I can ask is that you forgive me my past and foolish ways. For a while I thought the whole…thing…was canned. But I guess I knew that now, because I'm on trial and back in the news, Frank would be wheeling and dealing to have the book of letters on again."

"That gives him a hard-on, does it?" I interrupted, spitefully crude.

"Whatever. It's his scheme and Pete's now. It's for them and their lawyers to figure out. I couldn't care less at this point. Believe it or not, I have other things on my mind. So should you, mister."

"Like your book deal with Dutton and Judy? Is that another Glen Peters' church of salvation enterprise too?"

"That I don't know about either," she said. "See what I mean? This all infuriates me. If I could stop it, I would. The letters, I mean. But I can't. Maybe it will all just fade away. Now is not the time to worry about that, is it? Please won't you calm down?"

“I’m sorry, Leslie, I don’t know where that comes from.”

Or at least I wasn’t certain.

“When will you be going back to Canada, if you’re still going?”

“In a week. I said that already. That should be soon enough to see about those jobs Andy and Bruce wrote me about. I’ll meet with them when I get there. Though to be honest, I’d rather teach English lit than coach at this point. But, right now, we need the money, and I’ll do whatever it takes to get my end together.”

Leslie looked sad and disappointed, and I couldn’t blame her. Or, maybe, I was reading too much into her expression.

“Look Les. There is something else about Santa Barbara I wasn’t going to mention until I heard back again. On Wednesday, I spoke with someone in the Faculty of Education…Professor Copeland. Provided I have the MGB fixed in time, I’ve made an appointment to drive up and meet him next Thursday…probably more filling in forms. He’s not the one I originally wanted to see, but he’s the only one there who can see me before Christmas.”

“That’s fantastic, Peter. See? This is what I mean. Things are moving our way. Can’t you feel it?” Leslie asked. “Try to relax, and just go with the flow.”

“I’m sorry for what I went off about before,” I said. “It’s good to see you excited this way, and I don’t want to nix or to jinx it.

“Hey, what’s the matter? What’s wrong?” I asked, sensing her mood had stepped back into the shadows.

“The thought of your leaving for Canada has me uptight. I’m going to miss you, but…” she paused after straightening up on her stool, “we need to stop acting like a couple of punks and be brave. We have to do what is right for each other, remember? You will come back to me, won’t you?”

“Isn’t that a rhetorical question?”

15

SCAR TISSUE

Spent my last night before leaving LA with David Van Houten and Max Keith. I forget where we started but remember ending up at Max's apartment on South Oakland Avenue in Pasadena. I liked the fact that in place of a lot of law books or trophies, Max's city residence (he lived on a ranch near Paso Robles) had piles of *Time Magazine* and *National Geographic* all scattered about. On the mantle there was a card with an autographed picture of actor Steve Reeves posing with film director Cecil B. De Mille. The inscription read, "Happy Birthday, You Great Big Hunk of Man." It was signed, but there was no way to decipher who signed it or for whom it was intended.

David and I were high on Rojo Mezcal, lemon slices and Mexican sea salt. Max stuck to tried and true Early Times Kentucky Straight Bourbon. We'd been talking that night about Leslie, of course. And I discussed feeling torn about leaving her during the midst of her trial. My heart wanted to stay but my gut said I needed to go. I felt completely unsettled. Before leaving early, Davy raised his glass to Max and then to me, and said, "Here's to you, you great big hunks of man."

He wasn't so drunk that he couldn't drive home on his own. I spent the night under a thin blanket on Max's couch.

Max dropped me off at noon the next day in front of the Air Canada reservations desk at Los Angeles International Airport. We waved goodbye and he sped away in his gloomy Scirocco. I spent most of Flight #792 staring out the window at the slow-moving landscape below. The rest of the time, I either read or wrote letters. After the mountains and deserts came winter plains, then at last more familiar lakes, frozen rivers, and deciduous forests. There was plenty of time to

catch up on my diary.

My plane touched down on time at Pearson International Airport in Toronto at 9:00 p.m. The tarmac was wet from rain, sleet, and melted snow. It took the best part of an hour to clear customs. My brother Mike picked me up. When we got home to my mum's, she welcomed me with a smile and a huge hug, of course, then right away told me that Mr. Tovell had called. So I called him.

Jackson Tovell, my old high school principal, put me on to a job opening in Scarborough. Teaching high school English literature, culture, and mass media studies. The school was the West Hill Collegiate on Morningside Avenue, fifteen miles east of Toronto. Jack told me they had already begun to review candidates, but he was sure they hadn't decided on anyone yet. He arranged to get me an interview with the head of the English department right away.

There was a blizzard on the fifth of December and no mail was delivered. Les called me from Sybil Brand. The news wasn't what I had been hoping to hear. A couple more bail bond proposals had either been dissolved or delayed yet again. The next day, I had an appointment to meet with Andy Higgins and Bruce Kidd at Bruce's office in University College next to Hart House. They said they had a proposition to discuss. But I only got as far as the bus stop at the end of the road. I had what can only be described as a "panic attack." Right as the bus came, I turned around and dragged my sorry ass home in a thickening snowstorm. We re-booked our meeting for Friday. I made sure this time I was good and stoned before I left home.

I took the bus and subway downtown to meet Higgins and Kidd at 10:00 a.m., leaving early at seven. Andy and Bruce were courageous enough to offer me the job of club administrator (and part-time sprints and relays coach) for the University of Toronto Track Club. I asked if I could have some time to think it over, but they knew that was bullshit. They were right. Track and field coaching is a longer-term commitment than I was inclined to make at that moment. There was no use starting something I had no intention of completing. In the end, with regret I declined the honor. I expected to feel relief at this decision, but felt uncomfortably anxious instead. Now I was nowhere.

Leslie and Max were back in front of Superior Court Judge Gordon Ringer on Friday, December 16th, requesting that he reduce the amount of her bail to $50,000. Max told the judge he would stake his professional reputation on Leslie's keeping her promise. He assured

Ringer that she was the last person he'd have to fear ever leaving the jurisdiction. Naturally, Prosecutor Stephen Kay opposed the request. With him, being a dick was a full-time occupation. His rote resistance was, quite literally, a no-brainer default. Mostly, I think he was just afraid of Leslie proving him wrong.

"She is not going to run," Max said. "She is not going to engage in misconduct. Her present mental status is normal. Not one psychiatrist feels or believes Leslie, at this time, is a danger to society or that she presents a threat to herself or to others."

The judge replied, "I think the temptation to flee might well be irresistible in a case of this seriousness. Motion denied."

Judge Ringer, however, did grant Max's request for a delay in the start of the trial. A new trial date was set for the second of February. I'd hear the rest when she called.

The interview Jack Tovell set up for me at West Hill Collegiate took place on December 22nd at 10:30 a.m. I met first with Mrs. Marg Minter, the head of the English department, then with her colleague Bob Gentile, who I assumed was the one who designed the culture and mass media curricula. The interviews ended just before noon, and Mrs. Minter said she would call back the week after Christmas. She wrapped things up by explaining that Mr. Ron Budd, the principal, was unfortunately too busy to meet me that day. I took this to mean it was him that was calling the shots.

I walked back to where I parked my mom's Camaro RS in the visitors' lot. The engine was cold, so I let it idle with the auto-choke on. While she warmed up in the meantime, I pulled out a small bag of weed I had stashed in the glove box and rolled a couple of joints on my lap. Just as I was about to light up the first one, there was a rap on the driver's side. I rolled down the window and Mrs. Minter asked me if I would like to come back inside to meet Mr. Budd after all. They must have been desperate.

Maybe I should have waited until after I'd had the chance to smoke both of those joints before I signed anything morally binding. But, by 1:15 p.m., I had a contract. I'd agreed to teach from January to the end of June—for a total of less than eight thousand dollars. I acted pleased. However, my decision was clouded with doubts. Mr. Budd told me I'd be replacing some fellow named Lilly but neglected to say what happened to him or why he was gone. No matter now. I knew I'd struck a deal with the devil, but a gentleman's word is his bond. When I told Leslie about this new twist of fate the next night over the phone, she agreed it wasn't an ideal situation. All other moral and bad-faith deliberations aside, the cold hard fact of the matter was that we

needed the dosh.

As 1977 was coming to an end and the New Year upon us, I read more about the confluent education program at UC Santa Barbara and thought how I might go about changing the world for the better. I went searching the stacks for copies of George I. Brown's *Human Teaching for Human Learning* and *The Live Classroom*. I photocopied my notes, mailed them to Leslie with a copy of Brown's introductory pages and asked what she thought.

George Isaac Brown was a professor of education at University of California at Santa Barbara. He earned his PhD from Harvard, where he also had taught before moving to California. He and his wife Judith studied with the re-founder of Gestalt therapy, F.S. 'Fritz' Perls at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur. As for his Gestalt theory of confluent education, what struck me first was how *constructively* Brown and his colleagues wrote about all the current confusion, suspicion and despair in education as well as the sometimes-innocent expectations of academic cultures in general. I liked their critique of the state of the art of the entire discipline. They were attempting to do something more positive.

In my next letter to Leslie, I wrote to tell her about confluent education—or as much as I understood it so far. That was one way of processing my notes on affect and cognition in tandem. I also enclosed a few more pages from Joseph Jastrow's *Freud: His Dream and Sex Theories* (1932) and an essay from the most recent San Francisco Gestalt Institute Conference (1976). The piece I found most intriguing was a speech Ram Dass gave about *love* and *death*—two of my favorite topics. Here's what Leslie had to say after she read my notes on these subjects:

HELLO MY LOVE:

NO LETTER ALL WEEK AND I DON'T MIND SAYING THAT I AM HURTIN'. I CAN HARDLY WAIT TO CALL YOU. I miss you. Had another dream last night. We made love and it was really fine. I dreamt we got married and had twin girls with lots of curly hair just like yours. We were married by a guy who looked like Geppetto (from Pinocchio), who worked in an old clock shop. I couldn't believe I dreamed that so fine and so true.

Then all of a sudden the kids were grown up and you were playin' football. I wandered on to the field in a daze to watch the game close up. But I got confused and ended up in the middle of the game myself. Kinda spacey. It was rough and I got really scared

and kind of froze. Then you saw me and dropped the ball—or whatever else you were doing—and came to help me get off the field to where I belonged. It was an action dream. Freud said every dream is a wish. I think we should teach our children that dreams don't just happen out of the blue, but are stories we act out in our sleep, because they have something important to tell us. It's like a hidden part that needs to be heard, isn't that what you believe?

I dreamed all last night of you and you were teasing me. We had a lot of fun. We were alive and we made love again. Then you said something in the dream that you said in your last letter. That you're 'tired of waiting.' So am I. All we can really do is keep our fingers crossed and hope really hard that our dream will come true. So tell me a story about the snow in the forests and what I need to do to stay warm in the winter. I have a few ideas of my own (wink, wink).

I've been thinking about what it will be like living up there in Canada. How I'll probably freeze to death. I'd get off the plane to rush into your arms and freeze on the way with my arms outstretched and my lips puckered up. You'd have to carry me home to the family like that. My teeth chattering so badly I won't be able to speak for several hours.

# #

I got your pants—they came with the backlog of letters. The officer is going to try to see if I can try them on…they fit! Perfect! How fine they feel. How did you know? You pay attention to details, don't you? You judge my body better looking at me in a grey ol' jail dress than other women are able to do. What I dig is how fine they feel. Super soft—so just by putting them on I can leave these hard times, steel bars, and bad vibes behind for a little while. I try to ignore them, but there comes a time when you can't turn away and still have a conscience. I'll just be extra glad when this whole prison scene is finally over. I'm also getting a little uptight about Friday. I don't think it'll happen. But at least we'll have tried. I'm writing a personal letter asking Judge Ringer for a reduction in bail, and telling him why I believe I deserve one. I'll show it to Max before I mail it, of course.

# #

Hi Honey,

Linda is supposed to be here. Her BMW keeps breaking down. She's going to start teaching self-defense to her students because they found the 11th victim of the Hillside Strangler. Some maniac running loose in LA. It's scary all right—and I don't know any of that kind of stuff—will you teach me how to defend myself? I never really learned how.

It doesn't appear Linda has made it, so I will make my desk on the bed and begin to answer some more of your letters. I got the one that was all cut up like William Burroughs. I'm sorry Linda didn't come tonight. She always sends you her love. I found out she did an interesting thing. Jude told me Linda called her and laid out her various feelings. They communicate better now. I feel she did it because it's so much easier to deal with other things if there aren't personal, emotional differences getting in the way. I'm glad she did that. I know her guard won't be let down. She's extremely loyal. I find myself appreciating Linda more and more. For her sincerity, loyalty, directness and other things. She really digs you and me too. So that's extra special—she gets it! Unfortunately, not everyone does…you know who…

# #

I may get my mail now. Fingers crossed. Lots of letters from others, but not one single letter from you! But I did get a sweet card from Pat Krenwinkel's dad. He's a really super guy and he told me to tell you that we must be like two fried eggs and keep our sunny sides up ;-). You'll dig him. Well, I'll go to bed now. Please let me dream—always and only of you. Leslie-Lou

# #

Hi Sweets—

I've been so depressed. Really down under in a very deep, dark, heavy hollow. I feel like a tired, kicked and beat up old dog. I've been in this dinky cell for almost a year now. I hate it. But those are my full blues. I want so much for you to hold me. Rock me in your arms. I can't figure out why you aren't here. I have nothing to do. I am bored out of my mind and extremely impatient.

Also I've been thinking about what you said about keeping our relationship in a 'private compartment.' Not isolated. Just private,

except for those we know we can trust. And our children will be strong because of it too. Family loyalty will be our first priority. I was thinking of the Christian Science lady. Did I tell you the talk that we had? She went on about how when two people are bound by true love and commitment—no one should even try coming between them. I knew she was referring to Pete trying to get in our way.

Honey, I want to get old with you so you can hold my weathered hand in yours, and we can watch the sunrise and set together. Is this too much to ask for? Hold me close and kiss me tender. And tell me what our lives will be like when we are in our sixties, watching coals glow in the fire.

# #

LATER—You wanted to know what I thought about "Two for the Road," with Audrey Hepburn. Well, it's about two people—it's their journey together. He is busy at first being a loner. He doesn't want any distractions like falling in love. She is a free spirit, but troubled. She senses the potential—both for glory and ruin. She realizes before he does that with individual success comes the distance. She doesn't dig that whole scene. Can't wear the success mask or take it too seriously. Realizes what they lost when they gained recognition. He was not being true to himself and that not only alarmed her but also it hurt her. But she toughed it out. I really dug it. The old MG and all the changes they each had to go through. Hopes and fears. They lace in and out. It was simple yet was able to say an awful lot. And I like what you said about the narrative structure—how the story is one continuous road trip from Calais to the Rivera. It starts with them in the present—then flashes back and forth from scenes from the past to scenes of the present. That was so cool. I love Audrey Hepburn and when I was young used to wish I were either she or Natalie Wood. And no, you do not miss me more than I miss you! Although I do concede it's harder for you to get over (get it?)

# #

The cellblock is getting really ugly tonight, so please forgive my scattered thoughts. Lots of pent up, angry, aggressive energy sitting inside these young punks. They let it out by picking on small, weaker, defenseless people. Making fun of physical imperfections. It is cruel and this upsets me. This just isn't right.

# #

Mom and everyone here send their love. I am going to try and mail this and hope it gets on its way soon. Oh good! A Carol King song just came on and I'm singing along. "All I want is a quiet place to live—."

I will sing songs to you just as soon and as often as possible. Must warn you though, once in a while I sing way off key. Sometimes, without knowing the words, you wouldn't recognize the song that I'm singing. I'm super-sleepy tonight. Night Night honey—only two more days left until I can call you again. I'll put the request in first thing tomorrow. I love you.

Yer Baby,
Leslie-Lou

p.s. Please don't forget me, Peter. You know it would truly break my heart.

# #

These letters of Leslie's, like all the others, were stamped front and back and on several pages at random: INSPECTED BY THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY JAIL. How reassuring, I thought once again as always, not! Then, I began a lengthy response to her letters—all the time purposely singing the praises of California girls and every town but LA.

* * *

Leslie called me on Christmas Day. She was still very concerned about the deputies inspecting our mail and recording our calls.

"I just don't get it," she said. "I've written to you so many times. So I don't understand your not receiving them."

She was frustrated by the delays and so was I.

I asked her, "Do you think maybe all that talk about spending winter in Canada made its way back to the judge?"

"No, let's not start acting paranoid. Who knows? It could be anything. Maybe it was because I went in wearing your blue jeans? They really fit nice by the way. I thought about you the whole time I was wearing them."

"Did Mr. Kay add his usual gentlemanly charm to the proceedings?" I asked.

"Kay was his usual ignorant-arrogant self. He said I'd told a psych once that when I got out, I'd move to another state and change my name. This was before I met you. And, at that point, the judge interrupted him. He said he felt certain I was speaking of eventual release, not jumping bail. Then Judge Ringer asked Kay if he'd had the notoriety I had, wouldn't he want to try to lead as normal a life as possible? Kay couldn't answer, because he'd have to be *honest.* He came back with some fast lines, way off-topic, so he wouldn't look like an ass."

"He'll never pull that off," I mumbled.

"Okay. And then the judge denied me anyway. He said he just wouldn't take the chance. I feel shattered. It felt like we were so close this time, it was bound to happen. I guess I was wrong, again."

"Hey, come on, Leslie." That was to be expected. But they can't keep you shut in forever. You're close to the end, you'll see."

"What do they think I'm going to do when I get out? Plot a revolution?" Leslie laughed. "Really…Judy and Max are probably coming this evening. Jude may have found some new hopefuls to put up my bail. The search continues. We're not giving up."

There were voices in the background.

Then Leslie said, "Hey sorry, honey. We gotta go. Time to say goodbye. Please say you still love me."

"You still love me."

"No, silly. You know what I mean. I'm going to have Jude call you..."

Suddenly she was cut off in mid-sentence. That was the first time I could remember that ever happening. I guessed what it meant was to remind us that Leslie was still inside a prison and with her a part of my freedom was lost.

On Tuesday, December 27th, 1977, I spent the first part of the day wandering around downtown Toronto. I was thinking of giving Gabrielle a call to see if she wanted to meet me. But then, quite by chance, I ran into Andy Higgins and Linda Hall in Yorkville, and we walked over to Allan Gardens to meet up with two more friends of theirs inside the warm greenhouse. I've forgotten the names of the husband and wife—a couple of chiropractors—who lived nearby on Winchester Avenue in Cabbagetown. We had lunch, got high and listened to music. Some neighbors and friends came in after lunch and

it turned into a small, spontaneous party. Someone offered me vodka punch, but I stuck with tequila and pot from Jamaica. Andy and Linda invited me to dinner, but I begged off and walked to the Sherbourne Street subway station alone. I headed east to Kennedy Road, transferred north on a bus to Sheppard Avenue and walked the rest of the way to my mother's house in Agincourt.

As soon as I stepped inside the front door, my Mom—who was absolutely beaming—handed me the phone.

"It's Mrs. Van Houten."

After I said hello, Jane said she had someone there who wanted to speak with me.

"Did you know," was the first thing Leslie said, "tomorrow is the anniversary of the first letter you ever wrote to me...wishing me luck and hoping we would meet someday when I got out? Well, can you believe it? I'm out!"

I did believe it, but couldn't speak right away on account of the shock.

"How soon can you come down? You still want to, don't you?"

"What do you think?" I said. "Congratulations! Leslie, I'm so happy for you and the whole family."

I was still reeling, breathless and stunned.

She sighed, "I still don't believe it. I have to keep pinching myself."

I said, "I'll book my tickets as soon as I can and call you right back. I have to teach all of next week, but I'll check how much time I can get off and call you tomorrow. Will you be at your Mom's?"

"No, I'll be staying at Linda's, far from the press and the weirdoes."

"I'll be there just as soon as I can," I said with conviction.

Leslie purred, "Yes? Now that's a promise."

"Les, remember what we talked about. Please don't leave me now and run off with the first other fine scoundrel you meet."

"Stop it. That will never happen. Come here soon, and you'll see you're my only man now and forever. You should know that by now."

The plans we made the next day were for me to fly to Los Angeles on the fifth and return on the eighth to Toronto—three days and nights wasn't a lot. Though my selfishness demanded I have her all to myself, conscience dictated Leslie would need lots of free time on her own to adjust to the light of day without my casting shadows.

Air Canada Flight #793 left Toronto at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday night. At the airport, I picked up a copy of last week's *Los Angeles Times* (dated December 28th, 1977) at a newsstand. The headline read:

"**Leslie Van Houten Freed From Jail on $200,000 Bail.**" I self-consciously gazed around to see if there was anyone looking over my shoulder. After small children, their guardians and people needing assistance, I was the first eager passenger to board the aircraft. The L-1011 flew non-stop and landed in LA just after 9:00 p.m. (Pacific Time). Like everyone else, I was in a rush to get off and be embraced by a loved one. Only, unlike some of the others, there was no one to greet poor old me, so I wandered around like a dog lost on moving day.

About fifteen agonizing minutes had passed before I spotted Leslie's big smile and long arms waving from across the arrivals' lounge. By then, I'd almost stopped breathing. I rushed through the crowd like a fullback in sight of the end zone and picked Leslie up two feet off the ground in my arms. The first kiss was just a peck on the lips, but the second kiss lasted much longer. When I opened my eyes, I'd already forgotten where on earth I actually was for a moment.

Linda Grippi, who I hadn't noticed yet said, "Is this yours, Peter?" picking my bag up. "I'm sorry we're late. It was my fault. First there was traffic. Then, we couldn't find a space to park."

Leslie added, "Well, at least say you're happy to see me."

"Yes, I'm more than happy to see you," I said, picking my heart up from where it had fallen.

The baggage claim area was quite a ways off through a labyrinth of corridors and posted security guards. One bag had nothing but books and presents in it. There was also a surprise that I kept hidden in my pocket. We traced our way out of the terminal to where Linda had parked her BMW. I climbed in back, and Leslie got in beside me. All I remember were glimpses of traffic and mountains between kisses and bangs of hair flying past my eyes. Linda was smiling and laughing the whole time she was driving.

Pulling up to their apartment on Victory Boulevard, I spotted my fickle blue MGB in the parking lot.

"Who do you miss most," Leslie asked, "me or the MGB?"

"No contest baby, you win. Then again…that depends on if she's quick to turn over." I said, knowing it sounded dumb but saying it anyway in spite of myself.

Leslie giggled. "I'm jealous. If it's going to be me or her, then she's gotta go."

When I asked her how the 'B' found her way here from Jane's garage in Monterey Park, she said, "I drove it myself. But I still need you to give me lessons."

"Les did great," Linda said. "I drove behind her the whole way and

watched that she didn't break down."

I stowed one of my bags in the trunk of the MG and carried the one with the presents inside. Leslie rushed to try on the few things I brought her. We three had a late night snack of nachos and salsa, before Leslie and I drove off alone for a little while. We parked somewhere close, where we got out to walk—stopping to make out whenever we wanted. Back in the car, I put the top up. There wasn't a square inch of open space left with both of us ironed in to the passenger seat, each taking turns one on top of the other. Kind of reminded us both of high school.

"This is our first date, remember." Leslie said, when I started to reach under her blouse.

Now feeling embarrassed, I began to put on a bit of a sulk. No doubt Leslie had seen this before. We both expressed feeling uncertain and awkward without too much explanation. I thought I'd better slow the pace down. *Discipline 007, discipline*…Once we returned to Linda's apartment, where Leslie's bedroom was a comfortable couch in the living room, I stayed long enough for a nightcap and one or two long-lasting kisses. Then, I drove myself back to Monterey Park to spend the night in Jane Van Houten's guest room.

The next morning, the rest of Leslie's family showed up for brunch at Jane's. David, Shannon and Betsy all came together in one car. Georgie came in from next door. (Actually, she and Jane had a door cut in the wall between their garages.) And, soon after that, Leslie and Linda arrived with treats they baked for the rest of us. In my journal, I wrote that Leslie looked spectacular in a way that I'd never seen her before. I couldn't wait to get her alone. That was all that I had on my mind.

We paid our respects to the others, then Les and I went for a ride out to Malibu Beach with the top down. Along the way down old Topanga Canyon Road, we pulled over to the side and idled at a spot where a film crew was unpacking their gear for the television show *M*A*S*H*. We stopped on the campus at Pepperdine and walked around for an hour before we got hungry and found a McDonald's. I went inside to order two combos with milkshakes and fries, while Leslie waited in the car. When I left her, she was singing along with Gordon Lightfoot's "Don Quixote."

When we got back to Linda's flat, Leslie and I were delighted to find ourselves alone at long last. So we chanced a long and luxurious candlelit shower together. Her suggestion—or was it mine? Does it matter? In either case, it was a pleasure to discover just how soft Leslie's pale and blushed skin felt. When she asked me to hold her

close, I thought back to an old Groucho Marx line Alan Alda used in an episode of *M*A*S*H*. "If we could get any closer," I said, "I'd be standing behind you." Something like that.

After we stepped out of the shower and toweled off, Leslie put on the nightshirt my mom sent her for Christmas. She'd sewn the crest of a pumpkin on the front, and Leslie joked about "Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater…" (who had a wife and couldn't keep her.) I was still too hot and wet from the shower to put on anything more than sweat bottoms and ankle socks. The scene was confused, of course, since it resembled my state of mind, body and soul. We were both nervous, and I, for one, felt the cold sweat of both shivers and sanctuary. I brought the candles in from the bathroom and turned out the lamplight.

I said, "I've imagined our making love many times before...all on my own, of course." At least that got her laughing. I tried to relax, but my heart attacked me.

"It seems strange just to be with another person," Leslie said, blowing out all of the candles but one.

Just as things were beginning to heat up again, we heard voices and a key turning the lock.

I called out, "Hey, Linda?"

Yes, it was. Thank the gods. I asked her to please give us a minute. Leslie rushed to put her panties on under her nightshirt, and I crawled on all fours looking to find where I'd thrown my blue cotton top. I opened the door, and in stepped Linda with a young boyfriend in tow. Both of them were teasing and smiling. They could see what was going on.

Linda's young man was politely introduced. I've forgotten his name but recall him as younger and taller than I was. I remember thinking that he was very good-looking. He said he was broke when I asked him to do us a favor. It ended up costing me twenty dollars to get him to take Linda out for pizza and beer. I made them promise not to come back for another hour.

After they left, I prayed nothing else would occur to interrupt this tide in the affairs of a man and a woman. With one arm free and my other hand pinched tight in her lap, I pulled Les's shirt up without hurry *or* hesitation. No objections so far. I pressed ahead out of compulsion. I lifted my knee up under her thigh—so to spread her legs wide apart—and, since she sighed when I did that, I took this to mean I should press on. Leslie untied the cord to my sweat pants and reached gently inside.

"Checking for a pulse?" I asked between kisses.

She giggled.

“Yes,” Leslie said, sliding my body inside her thighs for the first time.

All I could say was to whisper, “Yes is right.”

After what seemed like eons had passed, we paused to catch our breath and get our heart rates back under one-sixty. My teeth were still chattering slightly. Laying her thrashing heart against mine, Leslie breathed something ever-so-sweetly. “So what do you want me to do now?”

I cleared my throat and said, “Whatever you want. Let’s not be coy. But, first, let’s take some precaution.”

I checked the lock on the door, and then, just to be extra safe, I braced a wooden chair under the doorknob like we used to see done in the movies.

“That oughta hold ’em,” I said. “Now, with your permission…”

I got back under the bed sheet and proceeded to press myself once again between her tender lips—face-to-face and thigh-to-thigh—both of us panting and swaying in rhythm. When we finally untangled our limbs, we studied each other’s face closely. And once we began talking in complete sentences again, Leslie asked me how I got so many scars on my face, especially around both of my eyes.

“I like the way it makes you look,” she said. “Kinda like Marlon Brando, you know...in that movie where he plays an ex-boxer.”

“Terry Malloy? Don’t I *wish* I looked that good? That was a great role in *On the Waterfront*.”

Running the end of her finger over the two thick bars of scar tissue cut across my right cheek, she said, “Do you remember? Once you told me that a person without scars hasn’t dared to live. You wrote that in one of your letters.”

Brushing her bangs back to reveal the faint “X” she’d once engraved on her forehead, I said, “Yes. The same goes for you, Brutus.”

After that, we stopped talking for several minutes. We just rocked gently in each other’s arms. Once she got dressed again, Les brewed Black China tea for herself and double shots of espresso for me on Linda’s stovetop. We took some time to discuss our individual schedules for the next couple of months. Leslie had more free time coming to her than I did—seemed only just. Though, there was something about that that annoyed me. I complained about our having so little time to spend together, which seemed an odd thing for a loner like me to complain about.

“When are you coming back for your interview in Santa Barbara?” she asked.

“March 17th. Professors Brown, Shapiro and Phillips. That’s a Friday. Court won’t be in session, so we can travel up there together, if you want to. I’ll have ten whole days and nights off.”

“Yahoo! Santa Barbara. Don’t you just love it?” she said. “We can pretend it’s our honeymoon.”

“Which reminds me,” I said. “I have something else I want to show you. I reached into the right side pocket of my jeans and handed Leslie a small, unwrapped gift box made of tin with a tile of polished pink and blue ivory. Leslie looked taken aback at first. Then, she opened the box to see what was rattling inside on a cube of cotton wad. She started smiling again when she opened it. And then, just as quickly, turned pensive.

“I know it’s not much for now,” I said. “Try it on. It may need some sizing. Just a sliver of a stone. Still I hope that you like it.”

“I think it’s flawless. I love it,” she said, slipping the ring on her finger and holding the thin gold band with the lonely diamond up to the light.

“Just do me a favor and kiss me so I won’t have time to start crying.”

First I kissed her gently on the back of the hand, then on each of her cheeks, then her eyes and, finally, pressed my lips against hers—which were trembling.

I said, “Please don’t cry unless you’re happy.”
“I am…very happy,” she said.
Then, I cried instead.

16

AN ACADEMIC PREPARES

American Airlines Flight #50 left Los Angeles International at 12:45 p.m. and arrived in Toronto just past 8:05 in the evening. I was so sick on the plane that it spoiled the in-flight movie for me—*The Deep*, starring Jacqueline Bisset, Robert Shaw and, the rebel, Nick Nolte. I didn't sleep a wink that night of the new moon with the usual symptoms. I chewed my nails ragged. I was delirious with hard-earned resentments and real (or imagined) losses to cope with. Is it any wonder to anyone else that I felt so torn apart and confused?

When I got out of bed in the morning, my throat was as bloody and raw as my nerve endings. There were no classes for me to teach on Monday, but I had admin errands and needed to tick off all the boxes. There was a staff meeting at ten o'clock. Teachers called it "the zoo." Just as well, I kept to myself and nursed my sore throat by sucking on oranges I'd laced with two fluid ounces of Smirnoff Vodka —each. I injected them using a 3-ml syringe and a heavy-gauge needle. If I'd had access to Demerol, I'd have shot that instead. I was hurting in more ways than one and feeling sorry for myself.

Learning more about mass media and culture studies was probably a lot more fun for me than it was for the students. Despite my frustrations with kids who hadn't a lot of experience with reading or writing, I did my best each weekday morning to introduce them to the history of newspapers, radio and TV. Since I knew so little about it myself, I tried to lead it like an expedition into the past unknown. Our text was Marshall McLuhan's brilliant *Understanding Media: The*

Extensions of Man, which was great for me but, for many of them, not so hot. In the afternoons, I taught the elements of screenwriting, which I also knew nothing about. My approach was to present my own enthusiasm for the subject—for what it's worth—and hope that didn't come across as indoctrination.

I also had two senior classes of English lit every day of the week. *Othello* until March break, then *Romeo and Juliet* until June. During my "spares," I hung out with some new people I'd met in the staff room. The first person I made friends with was another first-year English teacher named Nadine Segal. Nadine was an attractive blonde with a lot of wit, sparkle and charm. She was about my same age, only much smarter and the popular center of our crowd of rookie teachers. Through Nadine, I met Sondra, Greg, David, Brian and Elliot. Sondra had been a teacher for five years already and hadn't quit yet. The rest of the guys were just getting started. Odds were, I wouldn't last until summer. That's what my good friends David and Sue Caruana-Dingli said, and I hoped they were right.

Time crept in its petty pace all right already. I'd grown impatient waiting for Leslie's letters, which I missed and depended on. I told her that every chance that I had on the telephone.We'd taken to calling each other two and sometimes three times a week for our mutual solace. Usually, she'd call collect from Linda's or from wherever else she was staying. Leslie called after midnight her time. That's when long-distance rates were the cheapest. I preferred letters to late night phone calls interrupting my sleep—which I wasn't getting enough of. First-year teaching requires lots of preparation in place of experience.

After my birthday in January, Leslie's letters began appearing once again in my mailbox. The return address was no longer from L. Van Houten, Booking No. 4186-613, but rather from an entirely new person calling herself L. Chiaramonte, c/o 22246 Victory Boulevard. Leslie's new address and secret identity seemed a nice way of her starting over. The first letter, stamped from Woodland Hills instead of the county jail, read in part:

Dearest Peter~

I miss you so deeply. And as always, the words are shallow in tryin' to tell you my heart. Being near you is the most natural, right thing I have ever felt in my life. Believe me. I want so much for us to be together forever and always. The way it's so obvious we are meant to be. Boy, did we ever luck out!

I look at my ring constantly. Thursday I will get it sized. Then

I'll ask Linda to take a picture of my hand and send it to you with all my love.

This evening Mom and I will have our first real chance to be alone and I'm going to tell her the wonderful news. But I want to do it when I'm alone with her, keeping in mind all the things that we spoke of. That talk you had with her really did wonders. Ever since then she has been so mellow about us making definite plans for the future. I think it's something she and I should share alone as mother and daughter.

I'll close this now so it can get on its way from me to you. I'll write again tomorrow after I'm finished work. Please know I love you and don't you forget.

Yours always~
Leslie-Lou

p.s. Your birthday present may be late. I had it made by a silversmith. But I know that you'll love it. It represents your Mercurial personality. That's a hint…

* * *

Leslie made her first public appearance as a free woman on Wednesday the 25th of January. She and Max Keith had a hearing in court before the judge. Max had requested a further postponement of Leslie's trial. Judge Ringer moved the trial date from February 2nd to the 21st but said it was the last delay he would grant. Max hoped he was just passing off.

When reporters asked her what had been the most difficult thing to adjust to since she had been set free on bail, Leslie explained, "Planning my own time. After all this time in prison or jail, it seems strange to be able to decide for myself what I can do each day."

She said she'd been so busy "catching up on lost time" with her family and friends and that "No," she had not taken time to go the movies or other social entertainments.

Bill Farr in the *Los Angeles Times* reported: "One of those friends she had seen in the past month is a 'boyfriend who lives out of state. We have been able to spend a few days together,' she said with a shy smile. She steadfastly refused to say anything that might identify the man. 'I don't want to embarrass the people around me,' she added.

"When asked about reports that she raised the bail money by receiving a large advance on a book she plans to write? 'It just isn't

true,' she replied. 'My friends and family got that money together.' But she conceded she might write a book in the future.

"To the apparent amazement of the newsmen who swarmed around her, she said that book will not be about her life with the Manson family. 'That would not contribute anything to anything or anybody,' she said, even though a reporter noted, 'It could be very lucrative.'

"She hopes to further her education, whether she does it in prison, if she is again convicted of first-degree murder, or as a regular coed, should there be some other verdict. 'It's hard to focus on the future because of it,' she said. 'I yearn for it to be over and for society to let me be the person I am today, not that person who was with the Manson family, who was a stranger even to me."

* * *

Jury selection finally got underway sometime in February. For Leslie, the process wasn't as meticulous as it was agonizing. Some citizens begged off jury duty for perfectly understandable reasons. Financial hardship is always a fair one to choose, since, in our bank-managed system, it almost always applies. Few working people can afford to serve on such a lengthy case for months at a time away from their jobs. Besides a lot of romantic odds and ends, here's how Leslie described her time seated in court during this phase of the process.

Hi Hon!

So now it's just three more weeks and you'll be here. It's harder to write decent letters. I know you think the phone is a drag. But I think we both need to hear 'I love you' more often. I know I do. It's important to me. Don't you still love me?

It's such a drag that I'm back here in this scene again. What a waste of everyone's time. I feel my life draining away while lawyers argue about nothing but nothing. Tonight I go to ballet. I need a good stretch. I missed last week because I was at the Malones'. This is good exercise in preparation for natural childbirth. I need to keep it up and not miss too many more chances to go.

I dig my judge. So far I dig him a lot. The more I watch and listen to him the more I do. I'm feeling positive right now. I just hope my instincts are true. I know I've been wrong before. I hope what I'm feeling is some sort of momentum, and not the Earth about to break loose and swallow me up.

I'm in court and it's dragging on. Losing more jurors all the time…already on the second batch and I've lost two and got lots more to go. It always makes me feel so weird to hear complete strangers say how much they hate me. I sure will be glad when it's over. Sitting here and listening to lawyers nose around in the worst parts of people's lives. Their game is about determining if other people's prejudices match their own. It's such a pathetic process. One thing I would never want to be is a lawyer. Yucko.

Lunch is over now and all I had was a hamburger. Pretty gross. Back to the same ol' stuff. I lost five out of this batch. They didn't seem all that nifty. A lot of them just said straight out they wanted a conviction. No ifs, ands, or buts. It's a reflex reaction. Sometimes I think these people are as programmed as I was.

I'm really anxious for you to come soon so we can talk and discuss things. There are so many things to talk about. There's a lot of pressure here, believe me. It's not easy. It's still a lot like being in prison. Just getting to court is a chore. I'm anxious to stop all this running back and forth. I hope we can spend some laidback time—you know—just the two of us talking and hanging out. Being alone in each other's arms.

Some lady just said she doesn't "quite" want to hang me, because I should have "the benefit of a reasonable doubt." Boy she was a creep. Super creep—GOODBYE!! Now a guy says his wife is upset and freaked out by perceived threats of harassment. He says he doesn't want to sit on my jury because it's going to drive him and his wife nuts! Seems like that ship left the dock a long time ago. Goodbye Mr. Nuts. On to the next one. The same old routine. They must have looked at a hundred people today. Just about all of them had to be excused. I don't think any of them wanted to be here anymore than I do. I'm not looking forward to this ordeal. Aren't you glad you don't have to be here to witness this yourself…? This whole thing is making me grumpy. I'll be talking to you about it tonight.

Come hold me tight tonight in my dreams…? I want to kiss you!

* * *

All throughout February, either Les or I would telephone the other on a Friday or a Saturday night. I often tape-recorded our calls with a Radio Shack pick-up wired into my Sanyo cassette.

One Saturday night, Leslie called from Santa Barbara, where she

and Linda Grippi had gone for a break from their various trials and tribulations.

"What are you up to, mister?" Leslie asked.

"Reading the final act of *Othello*," I said. "What about you?"

"Talkin' to Linda...reading brochures about UCSB and the city of Santa Barbara. Would you rather live in the city or near the campus in Isla Vista? I think we should check out both scenes. Which do you think would be the most likely to have room enough for the garden I want?"

"I'm sure you'll know when you see it," I said. "Take your time and keep looking 'til *it* finds *you*. It's kinda like falling in love. How long are you guys planning to stay before heading back to LA?"

"Leaving SB tomorrow. I'm coming back this way soon again with the Malones. Oh, oh! I just noticed something I want to tell you. It says here the married student housing is separate from everything else. Nope. No room for a garden there. There's a place to get lumber for bookcases and stuff...and a needlework place where I can get all the things that I'll need. It says non-resident tuition is six hundred thirty-five dollars per credit. Does that mean you too? Doesn't that change when we're married?"

"Everything changes when we're married," I said, pausing to think that one over.

"Hey Les, did I hear you say something last time...right at the end...maybe I didn't hear it right. Did you say Manson's been sending you letters?"

"I got two letters, yeah. He knows that I'm out, which is why he probably sent them. Oh god, I'll type them up and send you copies. Maybe you can make better sense of it than me or Max. Manson's mind is a creepy jumble. You'll see. Tell me if you think he's threatening to kill me or somethin'?"

"Have them Xeroxed."

"Can't. They're in pencil...and messy. Max needs the originals to stay here in the office. But I'll type in the things he misspells. Sometimes he does that on purpose."

"I'd love to see how his mind works. That tiny scat of a man. What threats does he...?"

"I wasn't upset. But then Pat sent me one that sounded just like his..."

"Pat Krenwinkel? What's that about?"

"Charlie's just tryin' to stir things up and get some attention. That's what I think it's about...getting Pat to get to me. The rest is beyond me.

"He says that I'm lost, of course. In the second letter...I'll send you both...he sort of starts *tryin'* to talk to me. He's sort of trying to make sense. Mostly they're…you know...shit. Calling me names. He's basically saying how fucked up I am as a person.

"You know what ticked me off was the way he misspells my name on the envelope, 'L-E-S-S,' right? Well, I can accept that coming from him...knowing his game now as I do. So he's saying I'm less of a person does not bother me. Nothing he says even matters to me. But when Pat did it...that hurt. Because I know damn good and well that her name isn't 'P-A-T-T,' ya know? So I got kinda pissed off at that."

"Maybe this was all Charlie's doing? You can't blame her if he's deluding himself into believing he's still in control."

"I just wrote her a real nice letter and told her, 'Do what you do, Pat. Just remember, I know you. And I'm just fearful that you'll forget that I know you and that you've known me.' I told her I had a funny feeling that 'you're going to start seeing me through other people's eyes.' Just like the strangers I see looking at me at the courthouse."

* * *

After Valentine's Day, I'd started teaching Shakespeare's *Othello* to two senior classes. Shouldn't say, "teaching" exactly. Whatever it was, it wasn't that. What I did was begin by asking the students what, after nearly four years of high school, they could tell me about (1) Elizabethan theater, (2) the life of Shakespeare and (3) the source of the plot. What a yawn. To make matters worse, I assigned some of them parts from Act 1, Scene 1 without further ado. Not a very original start.

When students read through the scene, their characters all sounded like detached and discarnate answering machines. I don't know what I expected. Probably something more akin to poor players strutting and fretting on a Venice street at night, rather than stuttering and shivering mechanical voices echoing in a cold and dark portable classroom. I was a scholar, an athlete, an artist! No gentleman, mind you. But, nonetheless, this was hell to pay for the promises made to the woman I loved. Of all the terrible jobs I've ever had, this was the absolute worst ever.

I described—all but the last part—of this unpleasant event to Nadine and Sondra. We routinely took our "spare" periods in the staff room together. We were the only ones seated in that vinyl and Steelcase décor who were not smoking or playing cards. Acting out the part of the boy, I had playing the villain, Iago, in my last class. I

mimicked his lines in response to Desdemona's father's asking him who he was.

"Our Iago replied, 'I am the one, sir, that comes to t-t-tell you, your daughter and the Moor are now *m-m-making the beast with two blacks*…' The entire class erupted in laughter.

"The thing is," I carried on, "for a moment, that actually gave the class some energy that had been missing. But I wasn't able to sustain the momentum. Soon, we were back to droning and moaning our way through to the end."

"There has to be a better way to go about teaching Shakespeare," Nadine said. "I would have thought a fight scene involving an armed gang of thugs was something the class could get into."

"They acted like they were stuck underwater," I moaned.

Sondra suggested, "The first thing you need to do is help them determine the play's basic premise. Have you read Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares*?"

"Nope, I haven't," I said, "but I connect it with Marlon Brando, James Dean and Marilyn Monroe. 'Method acting'? What do I know?"

"That's right," Sondra said, "The Actor's Studio...the method of personifying a character by drawing on the emotional memory of meaningful moments. The premise of the play is the answer to 'what does it prove?' *Macbeth*, for example, proves that 'ruthless ambition leads to its own destruction.' You see what I mean?"

"That's one way to teach it," Nadine pointed out.

Turning back to Sondra, I said. "Sounds good to me if you say so. But what about the Moor of Venice?" I asked her, turning my palms up with a shrug.

"Jealousy destroys itself and the object of its love," Sondra suggested. "At least according to Lajos Egri."

"Who? Lajos Eg-ri? Do I put him on my reading list also?"

I was beginning to think there might actually be something useful for me to get out of going to high school.

* * *

A twelve by nine inch envelope from Max Keith's office arrived in my mail. In it were two typewritten copies of the letters Charles Manson sent to Leslie from prison. On the cover page, Leslie wrote: "Lots of bad typing. I'm still pretty rusty. There are some words he kept misspelling, so I retyped them the way that he wrote them. It all sounds so shallow and voodoo-ie now. Notice how he tries to play off so many angles. Laying on guilt. It's the same kinds of junk he used all

the time. It's hard to believe his words once meant everything to me."

What follows is an abridged version of Manson's letters to Leslie. The originals are twice as long, but mostly repetitive gibberish. Manson called Leslie "Green" on account of her love for flowers and gardens. The rest of Charlie's Crayola rainbow-pack legend of nicknames refer to "Red" for Lynette 'Squeaky' Fromme (Manson's acting head of the Family in his absence, who was eventually sentenced to life imprisonment for attempting to assassinate President Gerald Ford in 1975); Susan Atkins, who was often called "Violet"; Patricia Krenwinkel was sometimes referred to as "Yellow"; and Sandra Good (who Prosecutor Stephen Kay once dated in high school) was called "Blue" for reasons I never heard.

Green

...You gave yourself to something and gave faith beyond your earth brain understanding. That is something still. As each one has fell down, become divided, lost faith etc. and Love understands the falling down and loss of faith, but a love that's bigger for other things sees beyond life, death or in and out games. Yes you got a life to live but its not your own... You wanted to stop the war etc. and you did and got what you wanted. But I was in a bigger circle than you seen…

Much more than I didn't have time to explain to you… Did you believe Linda Kasabian's story… Each that breaks their own circle with me broke their own circle because I was only a servant to the truth and in others thoughts I had less will in it than a child. Only people I cut or shot or beat were for the circle I seen as my own. Had you been for your circle…

I was and am so far out in space universe that I was already borned in the thought you Pat and sue brought to the court room. Judge older was about 2 years old and I let him set up on the bench because I loved the world. Don't be surprised if you see me setting in the court room on your 3rd or 4th trial if you can get off by then or if on the day you get out the dead woman comes to meet you...The change will come one way or the other…

What happened to all your hippie friends who wanted you to stop the war. How far did they go with you. Jane Folda etc. and the likes...As you have pulled and let others pull form the real reasons why things came down the way they did… I wanted to save

the damn thing. We did it. We saved a world we can't live in but don't worry no one else will ever be that crzy again.

So the earth's water will be red mud and air not fit for your dogs and don't come to me for no front game...I won't ever do nothing for none of you ever-----Red and Blue will never give up and I will never give up we are locked into forever life it or not...I don't see how you can get off on me when its me who been with each one will always be… Red and Blue, Yellow, Tex, and Bob, Bruce etc. All who been in worse cells and did harder time than you…

Your tiral has been a joke up and down the hall ways. I get the news days behind for I'm so deep in the hole no T.V. or radio and the papr I do get is a Hearst S.F. papr and it is pure B.S. I get a few clippings days behind and you didn't bother to see where your Red and Blue was at. Huh you gave all to athought and after death decided to change your mind. What about the struggles the rest of us been going through that you haven't even seen in your rest home. Bobby's face ain't good looking no more from base ball bats and Steve been downed and Mary's lies fell on us hard and the side of my face has been pushed in. Did you want world fixed over night. Weren't we moving fast enough for you. Girl you gave your life to all of us and we haven't fell down on that. And what of the 100's of kids in prisons all over the country that came in behind yous. They haven't stopped and won't stop until the job is done. I've been 30 years on a job and the little time you;ve done is a little gift to a big world...Are you gonna dupit off on someone else to get out or keep on wht the rest of us...Keep yur faith woman.

LETTER #2:

Before you came to the ranch did anyone ever tell you the turht, or care for you and your Green etc...Your lawyer comes to court drunk and phonie Christians work for phonie jews selling the bloods sacrifices of their children. What happens to all your Jerry Rubins, Abbie Hoffman's Jane Fondas...wanting to stop wars but only if it could make them some money. Your sould and brains were sold to the dollar bill brain before you were born. I showed you how to redeem your sould and how to save your world and al it did was cost me mine… You seen my good side and you seen my under will—now look at the other side of yourself. I stand right outside your courtroom in your thought…

Any for you to play me off as a fool is only your own concern

and know you this—as all water goes to the ocean (sea) rain drops in millions there is still only one water—I am that water and without me there is no Green so you keep giving your head to the lawyer and watch Green on her own cross. I could of and would have helped but but I guess you would rather keep your head on some other space project. So be it dust bowl…

I won't push you. Red's ka chamber will do that for you are locked in your own circle for as a woman locked what she thought was man, she locked herself in the money madness. You were neo-woman and should of kept up on our own thought…

In my own thought I'm the smartest person in the world for I am now your water and time for survival on earth is short. We didn't blow earth up but what good is it without water. Water is life and as all water is one so is water.....Also when you open up the gas chamber again that gives everyone a gaschamber for everyone… Does your lawyer still hate me because he didn't understand his daughter. Are you playing me as the willian they would be in their sex hang ups. If you play in likes they play in you must as much in the night of your cell you can't hide from me for I'm your alone and you are alone…

…I think you should look at your family again before Red's ka chamber gets to Green's re chamber 'cause if you don't you may not see any green left for it to rain on. Once a thought is set and locked to the universe only I can reset it for I never told you all I was doing because I trust myself only. your brain would not of understood it nor could you cope with it… I wish you get your wish and you could get out in Red's ka chamber. I see not break in the circle and your corss boss is in the middle.

P.S. The world you left in 1969 went on to somewhere else and its gone. The world Red left is running in her now ducks snakes snitches rat on and other hells that others have created with their lack of faith. I still hold faith in you alive or dead but look at what you are doing to Green and how nice lady bird took your tree and gave it to her fears. Why didn't you wrote? Did you think there was an end to giving yourself for a cause—all is forever always—there ain't no divorce in death life or in between...

What do you think that mark is on your head for?

Les was right. It wasn't just a narcissistic put-down. It was just as much a comic put-on. Who did he think he was fooling now? Was he

threatening to have Squeaky Fromm assassinate her in her cell? He's going to turn the Earth's water to blood and acid—I thought that was just a metaphor. I wrote to Leslie to say it amazed me to see how seriously he took himself and how little he had to go on. He didn't think much of Leslie or anyone but himself. And his thinking—such as it was—garbled his veiled threats into a laughable lameness. A lot like his lyrics and unimaginative, jailhouse moaning.

As McLuhan said, "In retrospect, all things are obvious."

* * *

All that winter of my discontent, every time Les would call or pick up, I felt there were always a thousand more things to say that we never got to. I couldn't rest, so I stayed awake late almost every night when I knew she would call. If I felt the least bit drowsy, I'd swallow the drug-soaked cotton from inside a Benzedrine inhaler and stay up for an entire weekend. Prior to class each day, I read cut-ups that I had pasted from Shakespeare and various authors of confluent education. "One Day in a High School: A View Through the Chalk Dust" roused some reflection on my part.

Stanislavski was also having an effect. Instead of going back to the first act of *Othello*, I began again with a five-minute synopsis of all five acts of the play. Then, I proceeded to skip ahead to Act 2, Scene 1, instead of continuing from where we left off. The second act begins with Othello's Lieutenant Cassio welcoming Emilia, the wife of the villain, Iago, to the city with a *kiss*—a common form of sixteenth century Venetian courtesy. I thought this would be a fun place to begin for the students. With a kiss! This is how I set up the scene:

"Roderigo has an obvious passion for Desdemona. Cassio toys with him the way some boys play with others they know have a huge crush on a girl. Got it?"

I thought this was something these kids could identify with emotionally.

My lesson plans for several weeks were to hopscotch our way forwards and backwards throughout the play but never at random. We skipped most parts of the play entirely on purpose. We moved in and out of various scenes, as if we were shooting a film out of sequence, and openly discussed which scenes to include and which to leave out. I thought we were all beginning to have fun. I was too much of a dunce to check. So it caught me off guard when I heard gossip coming from some of the students. The word going around was that my approach meant nothing but chaos. Some were complaining about

how this would affect their exam marks.

Martin Bijaux was in town for one night on his way back to Montreal for a visit—family business. His brother, Guy, was in trouble with the law. Martin picked Yorkville Village to meet, and I picked a spot near the corner of Hazelton Avenue. The name of the place, which I forget, has changed a dozen times since then. I arrived first and chose a quiet table with a view of the Cumberland walkway. That's where all the fashion models and showy shoppers strut their stuff. I was indulging my second Seagram's Five Star with water when Martin came in from the snow, hauling his suitcase.

"I'll have the same, Miss. Thanks," he said. "Just rye and ice. Well, Peter. This part of town has sure changed since the sixties."

"I don't miss the bikers," I said. "So tell me, how was your trip to Acapulco? Did Jean enjoy his vacation?"

"Most of the time, yes, he did."

"When is your piece on the resorts coming out?

"I still have to write it," he said. "Great weather though. Jean got sick near the end so I think he was glad to go home. How about you? How goes it with teaching?"

"Oh, so you heard? You hear everything, don't you? It's only for a few more months, until June. Then I'm headed back to LA and Leslie."

"Her trial starts very soon. When are you going to see her?"

"March break. We're planning a quick trip up the coast to Santa Barbara. I have an interview at UCSB to take care of. I've applied for the doctorate program in education."

Martin's eyebrows pointed north.

"Good luck with that. Listen, Peter. I'm not sure how to say this or whether I even should..."

"Say what?"

I could sense some dread already.

"Ah well...a guy I know who works at the *Times* says he knows your friend, Peters. Anyway, I've told him about you and your relationship with Leslie. Thing is, this guy said he heard something else about her being seen with some guy at the paper. Could be a reporter..."

"When was this?" I asked, taking a sip from my glass and feeling the certain onslaught of anguish.

"I don't know. Maybe a week ago."

The look on my face led Martin to add, "Then, I take it, it wasn't you he was talking about?"

The week right before her trial was to start, Leslie called me while on a road trip with our friends, Michael and Jane Malone. They took the motorhome. That was about a week after I'd sent her a caustic letter recounting Martin's report. Most of it I conjured up out of self-doubt and envy—my own poorest of rivals. She hadn't received the letter yet when I called.

"I'm still sold on our living close by the campus in Isla Vista, aren't you?" Leslie said, phoning from her room at the Big Sur Lodge, right beside Pfeiffer Park. "What week in March are you coming back, handsome?"

"I'll call Air Canada tomorrow to reconfirm the flight," I said. "I've asked my brother for Thursday the sixteenth. There's a direct flight arriving after nine at night. Will you be there, or will you be busy?"

Those words were bad enough, but it was the tone of my voice that I most regretted. In mid-sentence, things changed completely without warning. It wasn't planned—not at all. I was just ready for any excuse to explode.

"Don't start picking a fight," Leslie said.

But it was too late. Haunting images of some other guy taking my place possessed me. Where does shit like that come from, I wonder? My brain seemed to have tripped the auto-destruct button, and it felt as if I was taken hostage on a runaway train.

"If you're seeing somebody else," I rushed to say—imagining the worst possible set-up—"then what the fuck! Maybe I should cancel completely."

Coolly, Leslie said, "Peter, I understand you getting jealous, but I think it's a waste of time and energy. It's childish, honey. You're a better man than that. Yes, I do attract attention, and I don't think you should be alarmed about it, because I'm not. If I fed off it...or phony-assed to get it...that would be one thing. You know you can trust me."

"Is that what I know? That's not what I'm saying."

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying it makes me look like a fool…which I am, let's face it…" I ranted on. "Friends hear rumors that I can't defend…" and so on.

"Rumors are just that," Leslie said. "*Rumors*. There's nothing to defend. Don't blame me for that too. It's you that always listens to rumors. Why not trust me instead?"

Trying to shift the blame to someone else, I said, "I'm sure Judy has been just aching to set you up with some friends of hers. That way, she can be rid of me and start catching your overflow."

"What does Judy have to do with anything? I thought you wanted a truce on that. So what if that sort of thing happens? Means nothing to me. You think I'm so easily impressed with… whomever…."

"Fucking forget it," I said.

"Peter, I'm feeling like...rather than freaking out...you should be more complimented than uptight. If I encouraged it, that would be different. I am not a cheap tramp, and you know that. We have so many things to talk about and to share. Please don't make this into something it isn't."

"What's there for me to feel *complimented* about?" I shouted.

"That I love you. Don't be a bonehead."

Her voice tested honest—another strange threat to my ego.

I ended the call.

"I'll let you know about the sixteenth when I've decided for sure if I'm coming. Bye for now, Leslie." I said, and hung up abruptly.

I dressed for a six-mile run as far north as Steeles Road and took off at a clip there and back. I had a long and cold shower afterwards, then I got high and tried calling Leslie to apologize. No reply at any of the places I knew to call. I put my feet up and watched *The Grapes of Wrath* on Mom's Betamax.

The next week, Leslie telephoned to warn me of a change of plans in terms of where we would be staying when I got there in March. After all the cruel bullshit I gave her over the phone and in a letter, Leslie was gracious, as always, and sure to forgive me. I assumed this reprieve would last until the next time I made a similar gaffe and cracked under pressure.

She said, "I had it together that you and I were going to stay at Linda's in March. She was going to be gone on vacation, right? Now, she told me she's staying. She said she'd go to her girlfriend's and leave us alone, but that's dumb. She knows I'm not the kind of person who throws somebody out of their own house."

"So, where else should we go?" I asked.

Then, out of the dark, I barked, "Or is this just your way of letting me down? Something more you aren't telling me?"

"Stop it. Don't even start, Mr. Snide Remark. I thought we were past all of that nonsense?"

"I'm sorry, Les. I'm making excuses for being such a mess, not really sleeping and hating my job. I swear I'm defenseless. Jealous, jealous guy."

Leslie paused to take a deep breath.

“One option we have is that we’ve been invited to stay at the Malones’ in Laguna.” She spoke serenely. “I love it there, don’t you? Their place makes me yearn for us having a space of our own to call ‘home.’ I like the collections of things they have gathered. Simple things. Baskets, small vases, seashells, photos, and prisms. Slowly we will accumulate our own history the same way. I’d love for us to stay there the whole time; only it’s a bit far to go during the week if court is in session. Let’s plan to spend the weekend with them, once we get back from Santa Barbara. But, for the rest of the time, let me check around.”

“Okay. Whatever you say, boss,” I said, letting her tone calm my anxiety.

“We could spend some time either at Judy’s or Mom’s. That’s the easiest. There’s more space at Judy’s. More privacy too. I’m beginning to see there isn’t enough room for me to go on living at Linda’s. I need more space of my own until we get a place. Even if it’s just for the short term.”

I said, “I ache just thinking about how far away you and I are. I’m sorry. That makes me jealous over all the time lost.”

“Peter… I’ve haven’t dared to think about it much. Who am I kidding! I think about it all the time. I just don’t say it.”

“Don’t say it now, then.” I’d guessed what it was. “That’s not the plan, remember? Things are tough enough, and we don’t want to jinx it.”

“Yes, I know. It’s hard to consider, but, win or lose, they can’t keep me locked up forever. You’re worried that I might not get out right away and think of this as time lost. But we shouldn’t see things that way. I see this as time spent building our future.”

Warping the subject slightly, I asked, “What is Max saying?”

“The poor man is completely exhausted already,” Leslie sighed.

Another long pause.

“Wish you were here,” she said. “But we’ve discussed all of this over and over. This trial scene sucks. But we have no choice right now but to see this stage through.”

“You know, Leslie, I know I’ve been an awfully bad boyfriend. I’ll try to be a better man from now on.”

“You mean that…I know you do, honey,” she said—whatever that meant.

“I’ll wait for as long as you want me to,” I said out loud.

To myself, another voice whispered…*but I will not pine any longer…*

17

O DESDEMON!

Air Canada Flight #793 arrived in Los Angeles on time, just after nine at night. Leslie was waiting for me in the arrivals' lounge when I stepped off the gangplank. She was lovely and beaming, just like, yet unlike, any other pretty girl at the airport waiting to meet her boyfriend. I spotted her right away through the crowd chaos and clutter. She was wearing a pretty white blouse under a new faded-blue denim jacket and a pair of my boots and jeans. And she never stopped talking or smiling the two hours it took us to make our destination, one hundred miles up the road towards midnight.

We drove the whole way to Santa Barbara without stopping. Having the top down tousled her chestnut brown hair and even pulled strands of it out from under her scarf. It was just before twelve o'clock when we checked in at the Holiday Inn in Goleta. We had the pool to ourselves, so we took a quick, quiet swim under the starlight. The water wasn't terribly warm, so we didn't stay in. Leslie kept both arms wrapped around me under a blanket as we hurried back to our room. She had on a bright-colored caftan over her swimsuit, but neither outfit lasted long. I thought it was exciting the way she let them fall tangled inside out on the floor with the towels.

Still on TO time, I woke up early and went for a run along Cathedral Oaks Road for two miles in both directions. When I got back to the room, Leslie was just getting dressed. Before I changed for a quick

jump in the pool, I spotted a gift box propped on my pillow. I waited for Leslie to say it was all right before I dared to open it up.

"Is this for me?"

How pale that must have sounded. I slipped off the ribbon.

"Have a look-see," Leslie said. "It's months late, I know, but it's taken this long to have made. It was *supposed* to be for your birthday. Happy late birthday," she frowned.

Then, still sweating from my first warm weather run in a while, I followed up with a big smacking kiss on her mouth. Inside the box was a shiny medallion hung on a box-linked silver chain.

"How perfect," I said, taking it out of its cradle. "Here, help me to clasp it on."

I turned around and felt the tips of Leslie's fingers on the nape of my neck.

"Leslie, I promise I'll never take this off. Not so long as I'm breathing."

I crossed my heart with her hand in mine. She draped both arms around me and kissed me ever-so gently that, for a moment, I couldn't tell where my body ended and hers began. I'd never been kissed like that before, nor ever since that I can remember.

She told me, "Liberty dimes are ninety percent pure silver. Did you know that?"

"Same as you and me," I joked. "Ninety percent pure, but imperfect."

Leslie had found out the reason these coins are commonly referred to as "Mercury dimes" is based on a mistaken assumption. The face on the coin represents Lady Liberty, not the swift-footed messenger of the gods. I liked them *both,* and I said so.

Leslie said, "I had a silversmith cut out the face of one coin and weld it on top of the other. See the relief? So there are two faces and not just one. Do you like it?"

"It's hidden. I love it," I said, propping the coin on my thumb for a closer look in the mirror. "This will always remind me of you...forever and always."

I kissed her again on the lips and then pushed her back on the bed with her knees bent up to my shoulders.

She pushed me off saying, "You need a swim or a shower."

There was a delicate hardness to her voice.

"Do you know what these wings are supposed to represent?" I asked, looking down at my medallion.

"The guy in the shop said it has to do with 'freedom of mind'...or 'faith in the future.' Something like that."

“Either one works for me. You know what Saint Augustine said about faith in the future?” I teased.

“Not that I can recall,” she said, pinching the lobe of my ear with her fingers.

“He said, ‘Faith is to believe what you do not yet see, and the reward for that faith is to finally see what you believe in.”

Then, with a broad smile, I pulled down my sweats to prove a point I believed in. Crude, I grant you, but I was healthy and happy—however imprudent. So I jumped in the shower.

Leslie and I held hands all throughout breakfast in a restaurant in Isla Vista, sitting outside on a patio close by the corner of Pardall and Embarcadero del Mar. This time, we skipped the hunt for more rental places with overgrown gardens needing attending. Instead, we shopped in a few funky shops where there was great music playing. *Goo-goo ga-joob*.

After that, I took Les for a tour of the campus. Everything seemed scented with hashish and sandalwood wherever we went, except the Bank of America.

The University of California at Santa Barbara is bordered on three sides by the Pacific Ocean. Much of its early architecture was based on sixties-style tinted concrete blocks with Spanish tile rooftops in among odd leftover barracks. All of the buildings at UC were surrounded by lush, tended gardens with plenty of tall palms and aromatic eucalyptus trees planted around. We strolled past Storke Tower, wandered the malls, and toured inside the Davidson Library. Les was inclined toward the azure lagoon, so we walked down the sandy path that led past sea cliffs to the beachfront.

All the while, we talked about her trial and my prospects for grad school—about which, on both counts, we still had the jitters. Our first appointment was at 3:00 p.m. with Isabelle Reilly in the registrar’s office. That was a lob. The real test lay ahead. This meeting with the assistant registrar was mainly to sign ourselves up in case we opted for married student housing. We’d need a backup in case I failed in my bid for a scholarship.

When Ms. Reilly led me upstairs to meet the faculty, Leslie was free to wander around on her own. She said she’d meet me downstairs in the courtyard around five to five-thirty. Then, she gave me a kiss for good luck. Everything seemed to hinge on a few precious moments. Ms. Reilly ushered me in to a conference room where Professors George Brown, Stewart Shapiro and Mark Phillips were seated around a long table. The only one missing that day was Laurence Iannaccone.

"How was your trip from Toronto?" Mark Phillips asked me.

He was the youngest and junior member in the department—a frail-looking guy with wild curly red hair in a style that harkened to Harpo Marx. Mark held an EdD from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He hadn't published much. So I wasn't feeling too threatened by him, though I was rather in awe of the other psychologists from USC and Harvard.

"It's great to be away from the cold and damp for a couple of weeks," I said in response to impatient small talk about such things as the weather.

That's not what I came for. I could see Professor Brown was still looking over my file, instead of my present self, when Dr. Stewart Shapiro began to ask more pertinent questions.

"George tells me you have quite a background in amateur sports but little experience teaching. Is that right?"

It took me a second to refocus, trying not to appear too defensive.

"Well…yes and no," I said. "I've played a few sports...some much better than others. I'm teaching right now. And I have done some coaching and teacher training before. Quite a lot these past two years at the University of Toronto Track Club. I've been involved in a dozen clinics for schoolteachers and coaches. Does that count?"

Stew Shapiro smiled.

"Could be. To be honest, what impressed us most were your letters of reference. Very impressive," he said before George Brown cut him off.

"I liked what you wrote about skipping two years of high school and living with your principal and his family," said George.

We all had a laugh over my explaining some of that.

Then, he asked me, "What do you know about our program in terms of confluent education?"

"Only what I've read so far in your books on the subject. But I'm familiar with some of the source work."

"Such as?" Mark interrupted.

That started me namedropping scholars like Rollo May, A.S. Neill, R.D. Lang, Fritz Perls, Alan Watts, Aldous Huxley and a half dozen more before he cut me off again. Just as well.

Eventually, we got around to more in-depth discussions about higher education in its latest conceptions. They each took turns explaining their research and methods of teaching. *Confluent education*, as they put it, sought to renew one of the soundest traditions in Western education. That is, education for the *whole person*—mind, spirit, body—as well as the emotions. Not just the mind

by its lonesome. That started a congenial riff on the performance of sport as a branch of aesthetics. I thought that maybe I'd just found a home for what I'd been thinking for so long all alone.

When it came time to wrap things up, Mark and Stew said they had somewhere to be right away, and George asked me what my immediate plans were. I told them my fiancé was waiting downstairs and that we were due back in LA later that evening.

"Would you like to meet her?" I asked automatically.

"We'll walk you out then, shall we?" George said.

But, as we got near the courtyard, my mind jumped in the way of my body. The others looked back seeming puzzled when I stopped walking. Looking past them, I saw Leslie sitting on a bench all alone smoking a cigarette and reading a book. The line from *Love's Labour Lost* still comes to mind: "What fool is not so wise to lose an oath to win a paradise?" There was no choice left but to risk it. So I swallowed hard.

"Ah, gentlemen," I said without warning, "it's been a pleasure meeting you. This was fun. I hope you will give my application serious consideration."

George said, "You'll be sure to hear from us soon," looking puzzled.

After a pause to take another breath, I went on to say, "If you don't mind, I'd like to introduce my girlfriend, Leslie. But, first, I think I should explain who she is."

That line got their attention. I just made up the rest as I went along.

"I'm here with Leslie Van Houten," I said.

Each of the others took turns looking at me, then at each other. I could see they knew who she was, but it still must have come as a shock in the moment.

Stew Shapiro spoke first.

"Well, I'd certainly like to meet her," he smiled.

Then, with the others, he stepped forward to greet her. Leslie smiled, and I sheepishly shrugged.

As Stew and George held out their arms for a handshake, Mark turned to say, "You realize of course, Ms. Van Houten is a very controversial figure here in this state at the moment?"

I tightened my jaw and wondered if that would count *for* or *against* us? All the same, I knew there would always be other graduate schools but only one Leslie.

Les was charming as always just by being herself. We stood there shooting the breeze for ten minutes or so, before I sensed it was time

for us to be leaving. There was a lot for us all to take in and process. But, by the time Les and I skipped clear out of sight, I'd already begun cheering—even that understated my feelings. We were ecstatic! Quite a rush!

I shouted, "That went very well! Don't you think?"

Leslie agreed wholeheartedly. Things looked to be going as well, or better, than we had expected. We vowed to keep our hearts tangled and our fingers crossed. After a snack on our way out of town, we split a fajita and drove straight on to Highway 101 bearing south-by-southeast down the coastline. We each had that eerie in sync sense you get by being in the flow of things coming together. For instance, with immaculate timing, Leslie found station KTYD FM 99.9 on the dial and wound herself up singing along with some Moody Blues song.

Once the singing stopped, the sky overhead had grown quite a bit darker. I switched on the headlamps as we passed Paradise Cove. When I did, the Lucas electrics gave out—as anyone who has ever owned an MGB could have predicted. We'd blown a fuse. All the circuit lights had completely gone dead. I could have stuck a piece of aluminum foil into the breaker, but we decided to stop 'round the clock until daylight instead. Les rang ahead to the Malones from our room in a quirky motel alongside Highway 1—a place called the Malibu Riviera.

We had my mother's 8 mm Kodak movie camera, and (somewhere) there exists a three-minute film of us horsing around in the spirit of youthful exuberance, fear and desire. There was something irresistible about having Leslie all to myself. For so long, I had imagined it wouldn't be possible. The best scenes between us were the ones that occurred after the film had run out. I remember the prolonged lovers' tête-à-têtes, our laughter over creaky bedsprings and the noisy coin-operated gismo called Magic Fingers. Afterwards, we each imparted a wholesome night's sleep with a pleasant wake up call to attention at dawn between showers. I tried to mix up my humming like the hairless monkey that I was. *I'm a believer…I couldn't leave her, if I tried…I'm an ape-man, I'm an ape-ape-man, oh I'm an ape-man.*…and so on and on as if this were our honeymoon. Crazy, but happy—if unwisely in love.

Pancakes at daybreak for breakfast at the first family restaurant we found. No more nightmares reported, but hopeful fantasies just like regular folks sharing their mutual daydreams. Fueled up the B and, soon after, were back to making good time on the open road—only to be stalled for nearly two hours getting through sixty miles of so-called Los Angeles "freeways." We played tapes by the Plastic Ono Band, Bob

Dylan and The Beach Boys. And, of course, we talked and talked.

We were headed to a small coastal town near the southern end of the San Joaquin Hills in Orange County called Laguna Niguel. As I may have mentioned before, our friends Jane and Michael Malone lived on Grand Canyon Drive, less than a mile from the coast off the Crown Valley Parkway. After all the usual smiles, cries, hugs and kisses, the gals wandered into the wilds of Jane's garden to be alone. Michael and I sneaked off to the garage, where he tossed me the keys to his convertible Mercedes SL. We went for a spin down the canyon to Dana Point and parked in a lot alongside the Marina.

"So how do you like teaching?" Michael asked, sitting down on a lonely rock twenty feet from the shoreline.

At first, I stood in the surf cooling my toes.

"It's not really teaching," I said. "It's more like theater than teaching. But I like the subject an awful lot. After all, it's an excuse to get paid for reading Shakespeare. I know I'm being greedy...doing this all for myself."

"Not the students?"

"Not at all. And you, Michael? Now that you're back from Mykonos, what are your plans? Go back to teaching?"

"Just living. Jane has her art and her garden. I thought I'd have a look around for part-time work in some local college...maybe write a new edition to my last textbook, if so inspired. Speaking of inspiration, how did things go for you in Santa Barbara?"

"As well as expected, I think." I said with a laugh. "Les got to meet each of the program professors but one. I liked their conceptions of self-science and confluent education. It suits the kind of work I was doing with Higgins and Kidd for one thing."

"What was their reaction to meeting you two as a couple?"

"With Les? Charmed, I'm sure. With me there's really no telling. They didn't seem the least put off or threatened when I introduced them to her though."

"I shouldn't think so…" Michael said.

I laughed once I caught the joke he implied by his rhythm and tone.

"She's certainly less foreboding than I am," I laughed, and he smiled that I wasn't offended.

Indeed, I was proud.

Sunday morning, we four went shopping for pastries, books and sets of Mexican glass and ceramics. Before lunch, Les and I sneaked away

to be alone in their oversized bath adjoining the guest room—a luxury she liked to afford in the attempt to shed the last of the jail from her body and soul. We had lunch at the house in back of the garden. Soon after that, it was time for Les and I to pack up our gear and head back to Jane's place in Monterey Park. Michael was kind in helping me fit the MGB with new circuit breakers and fuses. We were headed back north with the top down all too soon and spent the rest of the week camped out in the guest room at Jane Van Houten's house. Leslie was shy about sleeping in the room next to her Mom's, so we played the music loud when we had to. Everyone knows the song "Wouldn't it be nice…" Good Vibrations…

Leslie had to be in court early each day of the week. Since I was visiting, she asked Max Keith and Glen Peters for evenings off from her two part-time jobs. Leslie, who had secretarial training after high school, split her time between Max's office and another job she had working for Glen downtown at the *Times*. Most days during court, I sat with Linda. When not with Linda, I hung with Betsy, David, Shannon, or someone else from the family entourage. The last day, I made it to court on that visit.Judy Frutig and I sat together a row back from the front. I preferred to hang back and watch from the corner, but Judy said she needed to hand messages to Max—although that rarely happened that I ever saw.

Once court was adjourned, Leslie whispered something to Max, and I saw her hand him a letter she had stashed in her notepad. She glanced over her shoulder at me, though I pretended not to notice. When I looked up again, I saw Max tuck the letter in his inside jacket pocket. Then, while Leslie and Max ran up to his office for something or other, Judy and I waited on West Third Street in front of the Plaza. I asked Judy straight up if she'd noticed Leslie passing a letter to Max in the courtroom. She said "No," she hadn't.

"Probably just another admirer or something. Letters get sent to her care of Max all the time." Judy seemed pleased to inform me.

"Does she ever write back?" I wondered aloud.

"She wrote back to you, didn't she?"

Leslie and Max dropped me off at LAX early on Monday morning. Les and I knew this would be our last embrace for another three months. I turned to make my way inside the terminal. Right as I did, Leslie tugged on my shoulder strap, swung me around and looked me straight in the eye.

"I know you don't believe it...and I never could stand on my

head...so there's not much more I can do to convince you. I hope we won't have to keep going over this again and again. Yes, Peter. There have been some letters sent to me at the office. Judy told me you said something. I just wish you'd asked me instead of her. There's absolutely nothing goin' on. Please stop this suspicion, because there's no need. Okay?"

Awkwardly, I said, "I know when this stretch is over we'll both be on firmer ground. I'll try not to blow it. I don't entirely know why I give you such grief. Really, I don't. I'm surprised by this myself."

Even so, I thought I might be projecting on to Leslie what I envisioned myself doing if I was in her place. Would simply recognizing that tendency in me help to change things?

"I'll call you tonight after midnight. What time is that in Toronto?"

"Three a.m.," I moaned, and she giggled.

"Until then," she said and blew me a kiss.

She waved goodbye from the car, and I watched very closely as she and Max drove away into traffic. I still had hours to kill before boarding the plane, so I toured the coffee shops and hunted the newsstands. I sat on the floor reading alternate bits of the *Times* and William Shakespeare. Air Canada Flight #792 left at 1:20 p.m. and landed in Toronto at a quarter to nine. I wish I could say it was good to be home. Only somewhere, deep down inside, I felt that it wasn't—*To seek their fortunes farther than at home, where small experience grows*. I believe that was Shakespeare, early on in *The Taming of the Shrew*—but of course.

* * *

The 50th Academy Awards at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion on April 3rd, 1978, was the occasion of Bob Hope's final appearance as master of ceremonies. Leslie was there with a mysterious escort. Don't ask, I didn't. Woody Allen skipped off, so, for sure, it wasn't him that brought her along. I've often wondered what Mr. Hope's monologue might have been like if he'd known a former Charles Manson codefendant was seated among the crowd. It was still a great big world, all right, but also a rather small club. I never asked Leslie who she was with that night at the Oscars, and she never told me. I was trying my best to act more grown up about such things from now on.

Other than for a politically charged acceptance speech by Vanessa Redgrave, who won the Best Supporting Actress award, it was a big night for romantic comedy—my second least-favorite genre. *Annie Hall* won for Best Picture and Diane Keaton for Best Actress. Woody

Allen won Oscars for Best Screenplay and Best Director. He was also nominated—against all odds—for Best Actor in a leading role. At least Woody had the good form to keep away from the most brazen celebrity side of the business.

The next day, April 4th, nearly seven years after her first conviction for the murder of Leno and Rosemary LaBianca, Leslie was back in court to hear Deputy District Attorney Stephen Kay present the prosecution's case against her for a third time. Here's what Mr. Kay had to say in his opening statement:

> "Neither drugs nor sex forced her, and she always did just what she wanted to do," he told the judge and jury of seven women and five men. "Even when it came to murder, she had to weigh and consider at least two days before she could decide if she could kill anyone…She knew there were two guns and two knives in the car, and she knew what they were to be used for. She knew exactly what had happened the night before and knew exactly what was going to happen. They were out to commit murder."

In Leslie's defense, Max Keith told the jurors that the woman who stood before them now was not same woman who took part in that nightmare more than eight years before.

"For her to have done what she did...to have believed what she believed...there must have been something horribly wrong. At the time of the murders, she was not aware of her obligation to obey the law. Therefore, she could have had no malice aforethought. Mr. Kay makes her sound like a tramp. That is not so. Evidence will show that she suffered from a type of mental illness that has been called 'group psychosis' by some doctors and 'phobia famille' by others."

Max's defense was the same as the one which had won him a hung jury the last time. He meant to prove that Leslie could not be held entirely responsible for her actions—not while acting as a member of the Charles Manson cult. For instance, who in their right mind would ignore a deal for immunity from the death chamber to protect some self-proclaimed guru faux-Jesus Christ? If that wasn't daft, then what was? Instead of the truth, Leslie lied to save Manson and Watson. Whose idea was that? Certainly not a perfectly sane Leslie Van Houten. Now she admitted lying during the first trial. But, either way, Stephen Kay used this against her. Max Keith said he hoped to show

how, at the time of the killings, Leslie's psyche had been so severely damaged by Manson's mind control methods that she could not have meaningfully premeditated murder.

Max argued that Leslie has admitted her part in the killing of Rosemary LaBianca, but her psyche was so badly impaired by the cult's use of psychoactive drugs for her to have meaningfully formed the intent. Without a will of her own, Leslie found herself at Waverly Drive that night for no other reason than to obey Charles Manson's commands. He was the one with a clear motive for planning these torturous crimes. And it was Charles Manson and Tex Watson who brought the knives and guns, not Leslie Van Houten. Max's defense was that Leslie had paid the price of her youth behind bars (many of those years in solitary confinement) for what awful madness she let herself in for. She'd expressed her sincerest remorse for what happened. What more could she do to prove she deserved a chance at redemption?

* * *

Leslie called after midnight on Saturday the 8th of April. She and Linda Grippi had returned to Santa Barbara to look at more places we might want to live if she got to stay out with another hung jury—*assuming* I was accepted into graduate studies. A couple big "maybes," but not seeming so far out of reach as before. I taped the phone call on my tape deck.

"Will you accept a collect call from Leslie?" the long-distance operator asked me.

"Yes, of course," I said, yawning into the mic.

"God, I didn't even hear it ring…I just picked it up to see if there was a dial tone. What were you doing?" she asked.

"Reading the last act of *Othello*. How about you?"

"Day dreaming about livin' in Isla Vista. Aren't you glad that I called?"

"Where are you exactly?" I asked.

"We're at the motel. Linda and me drove all around IV today. Oh…there are some fine places, Peter. There were some that had these overgrown yards that I could fix up so neat…I could plant the *neatest* gardens in them. Oh, and this one…this one had this sunroom. And there'd be room enough for an office where it's quiet and private. It's real old and run down, but you know…it's just the kind that I want. I'm sure we can have it real soon. Should I go talk to the agent tomorrow?"

“Did you cash the check I put in my letter? Is that enough, or maybe I should send another in case you need more?”

“No. Not yet. Maybe it will be waiting at Mom’s when I get back tomorrow. We’ve got to be back by seven. Karlene’s goin’ to be in town and wants me to go to a concert with her at the Roxy. Remember? I told you I was going to go to a concert with her and some friends?”

Just as well that I didn’t recall. Besides, I wasn’t a fan of one hit wonder Warren Zevon at all. But, had it been another Rick Danko reprise, I might have envied those who went tagging along.

“Oh, never mind that now,” she said, practically reading my mind full of sorrows. “I’ll call you back when I find out what’s what. You hang up first. Here’s a kiss...Smack! My darling, don’t ever doubt my love for you…not for an instant. Not ever. Please know that I love you. Say you believe me.”

The line that leapt off the page in response came from what I’d been reading before falling asleep. “I’ll see before I doubt...when I doubt, prove...and on the proof there is no more but this...away at once with love or jealousy!”

You can guess which character said that.

“Now what’s that supposed to mean?” Leslie had every right asking.

Before we hung up, I suggested, “I think it means it’s hard to be wise and in love at the same time, *Desdemona*.”

Didn’t I know it?

18

JURORS DEBATE FATE

The first week back to West Hill Collegiate, I was feeling displaced and all out of sorts—just counting the days and punching the clock. Word was out among the teachers that anyone hired in the last two years was going to be put on "surplus" status come the end of the school year. That had a lot of people uptight. And I think some of them mistook that for the reason behind my palpable angst. Someone said they'd seen the principal, Mr. Budd, leaving "Notice of Surplus" memos in everyone's mailbox. Certainly this caused a bit of a stir among all the rookies but one. I felt badly for my friends on the bubble, but, as far as my own future in the Scarborough Board of Education was concerned, I would have *paid them* to let me off early. I wished I'd thought of it sooner.

We were into the second week of *Romeo and Juliet* when Mr. Vice Principal, George Peck, came into my sixth period class to conduct an impromptu "teaching inspection." In keeping with the methods I'd practiced when teaching *Othello*, we approached the play back-to-front. However, I consciously neglected to explain to my "superior" why we were into the final act of the play in week two instead of week ten. I was still mixing things up by comparing both final acts to each other, turning both plays into comedies. I wasn't confused. I was experimenting. So I introduced the day's lesson as follows:

"Romeo thinks Juliet is dead from the poison. So, brokenhearted, he drinks the poison himself. Then, Juliet wakes up and finds Romeo dead, so she commits *seppuku* with his dagger."

To confuse our uninvited guest even further, I directed alternate endings. “Let’s try to read our parts as a comedy of errors,” I said, “not as a tragedy.”

That really took Mr. Peck over the edge. He sure left in one heck of a huff. I wasn’t worried. Though the kids seemed to think that I should be.

“Oh, boo-hoo,” I trembled, “what if Peck leaves a nasty note in my mailbox?”

I froze with mock horror by bringing my hands up to cover my mouth. Not every kid in the room was laughing. But I was.

Les moved out of Linda Grippi’s tiny apartment and into my old room at Judy’s condo on Micheltorena Street, #306. One Friday night in May, when Les and I had prearranged a time for me to call her, Jennifer Frutig picked up the phone to say that Leslie and Judy had gone out on a date to the movies. Leslie called the next night to tell me that the Sly Stallone blockbuster she’d gone to with friends had really sucked. I didn’t ask whom, besides Judy, she went with. I tried to act nonchalant. But inside, my jealous heart phantoms of dread were still stirring. I worried all the time if I might lose Leslie to someone else who treated her better than I did.

“Anything new and exciting happening in court these days?” I asked, grinding my molars.

“Max and Kay are still getting into it… Hey! Know what cool thing the judge said today?”

“I’m too tired to guess. Was it a good or a bad thing?”

“He said, ‘Hold ho! Gentlemen, have you forgot all sense of place and duty?’ Isn’t that great?”

“That is good,” I laughed. “You know Ringer’s the one who subpoenaed Nixon to testify about Watergate. He tried Ehrlichman and Liddy. Did either Max or Kay signal a recognition of where that quote was from?”

“No. They both kinda looked puzzled. Ringer just rolled his eyes and assumed he was the only one who got the joke.”

“You know which play that line comes from?”

“It’s *Othello*, right?” she said.

“Right. Only it’s not Othello who delivers the line. It’s Iago, who’s pretending he’s for peace when it’s really him who started the fight.” (I hoped this wasn’t an omen.) “What were Max and Kay fighting about anyway?”

“You remember Snake...Diane Lake? She was going on about how

tired she is of being dragged back in again to testify about things she's been trying to forget. The fighting was about something she said I said. Who can remember?

"Here's something else though...I plan on writing an opinion piece for the *Times* that has to do with teachers who bring very young children into the courtroom. I think twelve and thirteen year olds are too young to hear about the heavy gore in the coroner's reports. That's irresponsible. I'm going to ask Max to speak to the judge."

"How is old Max holding up to the tag team of Kay and Fulgoni?"

"I think he's been much more effective in this trial than the last time. We've been able to put some important things more out front...things that show there were different planes of involvement...like the fingerprint man. He said that *definitely* the prints in the bedroom were wiped with something different than with what was used in the living room and kitchen. Kay has been trying to put me in places I never was. And Harold True, the guy Charlie and Linda Kasabian met who used to live next door to the LaBiancas, turns out...even though he testified as to how illiterate Charlie was and everything...when he met him, he was interviewing Charlie for his Master's thesis. Know what on? On people who had seen visions of Christ. And guess what? It was the *judge* who brought all of that out! That's a good sign, I thought."

"What kind of influence does the judge have with the jury? What do you think is their impression of him so far?"

"It's hard to know what the jury thinks about anything," Leslie said. "Ringer keeps asking something extra of every witness to help them out. Maybe the jury can see what he's tryin' to figure out. Like he said to Linda Kasabian...'You mean to tell me that *you* went with a gun and knives and you didn't know anything was going to happen? You mean to tell me you didn't see the bolt cutters, and you mean to tell me that you went the second night knowing full well what was going to happen?' He isn't treating her like a saint and me as a tramp. Which is what Stevie Kay always does.

"Kay reads from a script. He's such a faker. Today he got lost repeating himself and going in circles. The judge had to step in and clarify what was going on for the jury. And, then, the judge asked Linda, 'Did Charlie ever talk about philosophers or people he might have read?' and she said, 'No.' Which is a lie. She's such a sad little lady. But this guy, Judge Ringer, he is really getting into it…I'm *really* feeling positive about him. I'm sorry we had to have a jury in front of him."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I'm sure I'd get manslaughter with him as my only judge," Leslie said matter-of-factly.

"Then, why didn't Max counsel that option?" I asked, still startled by the thought.

"Because that's too much pressure to put on someone in his position. That's what I've been told. It's like… I talked to a couple of the attorneys that hang out in his court and they said, as fine a judge as he is, *everybody* in this business has selfish goals."

"You think there might be too much pressure because of the publicity?"

"Even if he wanted to let me go, he'd probably have to cave in at the end. But he seems to be doing the best he can though. Man, it's clear to me that what he's sayin' is that by law I'm guilty of manslaughter, not murder. I feel like that anyway. And there's something else. It kind of creeps me out though."

"What's that?"

I wondered how much creepier things could get.

"Both Stephen Kay and Dino Fulgoni are deliberately trying not to question one single witness about the effects of the drugs and Charlie's mind-pounding 'Helter Skelter' into our heads. It's something they've gone out of their way to avoid. I can't quite figure that out. Everyone knows the story.

"Hey, honey, did you get any of my letters? I started writing again," she said. "Though some of it will sound moody 'cause I was upset when I wrote them. I wish we could just lie in and talk about things in private. I always feel there may be someone else listening in.

"You know I can't wait to feel your arms around me and have your lips kissing mine gently. You want to know something else? Nothing has ever seemed so right or more natural to me than being with you. I want you to know that. It's the truth. I'm yours, and that's all there is to it."

On the one hand, I longed to hear her say it. But, at the same time, I was suspect *the lady doth protest too much*. Was she hiding something from me? When Leslie's letters came, they came two at a time and all out of sequence. I invented all sorts of sinister reasons why her tempers might vary. But, for the most part, she seemed happier day-to-day than I was. I was more up and down. One thing was for certain, we both hated being so far apart physically. We each dealt with it differently. One card she sent contained a poem about having so many things and moments to share, "that would have made you smile and frown, sigh and wonder"—along with a caption where she added "Why must you be so far from me when I need you so…?"

Hello My Love~

I feel so bad about my lack of letters to you lately. But writing is very difficult at this moment. Doin' hard time. I move from the stress of the courtroom to more and more tension wherever I go. I try to relax and then when I do complete exhaustion takes over. It's clear something's missing—it's you! I long for the summer and starting life over in Isla Vista. It's time to get on.

I've counted the months and now I'm relieved to know it will be only weeks until you hold me close and not let me go. I got some more houseplants this weekend that we can take with us. I also found some string-of-hearts. Remember we saw them in that window in Santa Barbara? I can hardly wait to fix our place up. I think it's going to be wonderful. We'll have fun doin' it together!! Did I tell you that mom is giving us the desk that's in her garage? It's pretty big and strong. We sure can use it.

I'm in court right now. Mr. Kay is trying to break Paul Watkins' testimony. Kay's upset with Paul admitting the thought-control methods Charlie used and how it affected him also. Now little Paul is into saying he wasn't able to kill for Charlie. It's hard to go on hearing this. One moment it looks like the jury sees through it, then the next time it doesn't. I wish I could write you sunshine-filled rose-hued letters, but we have to face what's going on and be completely honest about it.

It's very upsetting. Now it's a word game between Kay and Paul. But it's my life that hangs in the balance. Kay, as usual, is pulling a lot of dirty tricks and the jury seem more amused than disgusted. This is why I haven't written you much about it. It's so knotted up and depressing. I'm super uptight. The only thing getting me through this are thoughts of us moving to Santa Barbara.

Any word yet from the U of C?

Kay is really getting raw jaw now—trying to make me into the ultimate bad guy. For heaven's sake now he's implying that Max and I stayed together when we had to go to Tecopa. He's so sick! I've got to contain myself before I hurt that man with angry words. He even looks like a rat—all nervous and gnawing.

I'm pretty much able to scope everyone's scene out. I see how Fulgoni plays off of Kay when he trips over himself, and which Max reacts to. They both take the bait. And then Dino comes back in as the knight in shining armor. (Tho' Judy thinks he looks more like a character from the Dick Tracy comics.) Dino is also really

into bringing out the 'N' words and Charlie's 'Nazi' junk. What on Earth has this to do with me!? I think it's just to anger the black juror and the judge who I guess is Jewish. God, honey—the vibes in this courtroom are as vile as can be. See, this is why I haven't written. This is what you're missin'. Glad you don't have to see what it's doin' to me.

It goes without saying I wish you were here! It won't be long… Man—I'm all Mansoned out. Can't you see?

I miss you honey~
Your girl~
Leslie-Lou

What was I doing away from her when she needed me? Why was I just as afraid of not giving her space as I was about losing her when I had to let go? There was nothing predictable about being in love in such circumstances. There never is, is there? I certainly wasn't the least bit afraid of what the school board might do if I skipped and ran straight back to LA a couple months early without a visa. I asked fellow teachers, Greg and Dave, what they thought Peck and Budd might do. The consensus was that they would probably celebrate by getting drunk and calling customs.

The last Friday in May, there were piles of mail waiting for me when I got home from school. None were from Leslie. But, under a stack of bank statements and other junk mail (including a post card from Tricia sent from vacation in Berkeley), there were two letters from the University of California, Santa Barbara. One was from Dr. G.I. Brown, and the other was from the dean of the graduate school of education. I opened the one from George first.

His letter said he was pleased to offer me admission into the Master of Arts with a view to the PhD program beginning with the New Year. The dean's letter further informed me that I had been granted a waiver of tuition and out-of-state fees, plus awarded a decent stipend for teaching undergrad candidates in pursuit of their California state teacher's credentials. Registration was to begin September 18th. I was ecstatic! Felt inside the way it feels when the javelin catches a draft and the nose rises up at exactly the right space and time to make a great distance. Effortless.

Unsurprisingly, I was excited to tell Leslie the news so we could update our plans ASAP. Maybe she was right about things coming together. I called Judy Frutig's place right away. It was mid-afternoon in LA, but there was no answer. So I called Andy Higgins at the U of T

and told him about UCSB and what my plans were. He invited me out for a small celebration at the Brunswick House on Bloor Street West. We met up with our friends Linda Hall, Barb Pike, Doug Byers and Bruce Simpson for pitchers of beer and congratulations. It was a proud moment for me, feeling the fates had interceded and turned the tide in my favor. However, I'd been wrong before. So why was I flirting with Barbara? I'm not a big drinker. I walked away talking with my better conscience.

When I got home, I tried calling Leslie again. This time Judy picked up the phone. She said she didn't know where Leslie was but expected her home any minute. I said I'd ring again later and to please tell her I called. When Leslie called me back hours later. She was no less excited than I was.

She said, "Things are finally going our way! Didn't I tell you?"

* * *

With less than a month to go before leaving to rejoin Leslie in California, I found myself doing less and less preparation for classes and more time readying myself for what lay ahead for both of us later that fall. In particular, I read all the F. S. Perls I could find in the bookroom. I ordered Roberto Assagioli's *Psychosynthesis* techniques for the "imaginative evocation of interpersonal relationships" and read it all in one go. No matter whatever else I used for distractions, I was obsessing less about what Leslie might be up to. Instead, I focused on how good it felt to be truly in love. But for how long must I wait to have all I wanted?

Then, on Wednesday, June 14th, I was eager to hear how Max Keith's closing argument to the jury had gone—same as the last time. He said the evidence showed Leslie's ordinary thought processes had been profoundly disordered by the combined effects of acute domination by Manson and the prolonged use of psychedelic drugs among his cult. Furthermore, Max wasn't asking the jury to acquit Leslie of any wrongdoing. According to the law on diminished capacity, the appropriate charge in this case, he conceded, would be manslaughter not first-degree murder. On the contrary, Prosecutors Stephen Kay and Dino Fulgoni argued that Leslie knew what she was doing and willfully took part in what she knew was going to happen. They offered the same tired and predictable slogans, saying a verdict of any lesser degree than first-degree murder would be "a travesty of justice."

That wasn't all.

In the *Los Angeles Times* article titled "**Jurors Debate Fate of Manson Follower: Leslie Van Houten's Third Trial Focuses on Mental Capacity**" dated June 23, 1978, Bill Farr quoted Judge Ringer's final instructions to the jury before their deliberations as "If you find that the defendant's mental capacity was diminished to the extent that you have a reasonable doubt whether she did, maturely and meaningfully, premeditate, deliberate, and reflect upon the gravity of the contemplated act or form the intent to kill, you cannot find her guilty of murder in the first degree."

Manslaughter, the verdict asked for by the defense, was explained as "an unlawful killing without malice aforethought." Furthermore, Judge Ringer informed the jury that second-degree murder is defined as "the killing of a human being with malice aforethought, but where the evidence is insufficient to establish deliberation and premeditation."

Reading this in the *LA Times* made me think back to what Leslie said about the judge trying her case instead of a jury. One had to wonder whether a jury of everyday people would be up to the task. The justice system had charged them with deciding whether or not the accused was capable of knowing that society would consider the acts she engaged in to be morally, not just legally, wrong. But, to my way of thinking, all Leslie could have known at the time was what Manson had drilled into her. Indoctrination wasn't free will after all. And even lifelong diarists such as myself can never be certain of what they were thinking up, dreaming of or just scribbling about nearly a decade ago.

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HEAVEN CAN WAIT

My last-ever week of teaching high school began with my submission of grades and ended with student complaints about final marks. And what a joke that was. I was already as gone as the wind. So what did it matter? I skipped all the staff meetings, speeches and phony end-of-year celebrations and stuff. I opted to count the stores of textbooks returned to my classroom. One hundred and forty Othello's and that sort of thing. Meanwhile, the rumor that I was engaged to marry one of the "Manson girls" had made its way 'round the school among students and teachers. But, once Principal Budd and his circle of administrative thugs caught wind of things, I stayed away from as many sharp edges as possible.

By Wednesday, I was feeling bored stiff and rebellious. I left school early on Thursday and skipped out on Friday completely. Instead, I rode my brother Mike's Ducati 900 Desmo downtown to the university and sat in on a summer session at Innis College. I went to see Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* and Jean Renoir's *La Grande Illusion*.

I wanted time itself to pick up its petty pace, so I stayed up the whole night and slept on the plane the next day on the way to Los Angeles. I recorded dreaming about my escape from von Rauffenstein's fortress just before waking. Time to return my seat back to its upright position…

Air Canada Flight #791 arrived July 1st at LAX at noon on the button.

The plane got in ten minutes early, and Leslie was ten minutes late. Perfect...as I could have predicted. We had no delays other than a quick stop north of Ventura for fuel, oil and coffee. She'd made us sandwiches for lunch, which we ate as I drove as quickly as possible away from LA to Santa Barbara.

We checked in to the Holiday Inn in Goleta again and then backtracked for drinks before dinner at the Head of the Wolf on State Street.

"Even onions taste better on this side of the fence," Leslie said, splitting her Mexican salad with me.

The rest of the evening we walked around the downtown, stopping to look in on a series of interesting one-of-a-kind stores and bookshops. My fave was a place called The Earthling. Before the evening was out, we drifted down by the pier, snacking on shrimp dipped in beer and sea salt. Enough with the foreplay, I thought. Time to get back to our room on the first floor by the pool. After a quick dip and a warm shower, we moved the bed into position. That way, one of us at a time could be making love with a view of the mountains.

First thing in the morning, we headed straight to Isla Vista to look at two places advertised as being available for the short term. It had been Leslie's idea all along that we temporarily set ourselves up close to the campus. That way, we'd save ourselves time looking around town at longer-term options. It didn't take long for us to settle on a first-floor, one-bedroom apartment at 895 Camino Del Sur. I handed our check to Mr. Bob Emery the landlord, who wrote a receipt for four hundred and ten dollars. That would carry us through to September 15th, when Mr. Emery's regular tenants returned for the school year. By then, we imagined we would find a more suitable space to settle into.

With that business out of the way, we took a quick walk around campus. No one we knew was around, so we drove up the San Marcos Pass to have lunch at the Cold Spring Tavern.

When it was time to pay our check, Leslie said, "Look, honey. See? I have a purse now. Did I show you? It's been such a long time I still can't recall all the things I need to put in it."

There were so many things about Leslie I still took for granted.

I held both her hands and gave her a deep, lasting kiss that caught the notice of more than a few of the customers. We left in a hurry and parked a few miles away on the dusty old Stagecoach Road that led to the site of the Lotte Lehmann ruins. We stayed up on that ridge overlooking Santa Barbara until it grew dark enough for the city lights below to take on the sparkle of lighted pearls. Our mission

accomplished for now, we drove back to LA later that night after a late dinner at the Fish House in Malibu.

When we arrived back at Judy's well after two in the morning, she was still up, entertaining a date she had over for wine and whatever. He was a shy-looking guy whom Judy introduced as some kind of photojournalist. Les and I had a couple polite sips of wine from the same glass and then quickly excused ourselves to be alone in her bedroom. I moved the bed while Leslie put on her pajamas and punched in side one of *Pet Sounds* on the portable tape deck.

We slept in Monday morning until Leslie's brother David came over to Silver Lake with coffee and donuts. He and I had a date to go check out a few bikes at an Italian motorcycle shop in Glendale. I was hoping to test ride a couple new café racers that day. Only, when we got to the shop, it was closed for the Fourth of July weekend. I planned to come back on Wednesday and bring Leslie with me when they were sure to be open.

That evening, Les and I went out to Westwood to see Warren Beatty's new picture *Heaven Can Wait*—a decent retelling of the forties classic, *Here Comes Mr. Jordan.* Leslie thought the roles Warren Beatty and Julie Christie played were convincing and very romantic. I said I preferred the version with Robert Montgomery and Evelyn Keyes, which she hadn't seen. Afterwards, we went for pizza and beer, and walked right past Lisa Minnelli and some dweeb-looking guy she was with in the restaurant. Where had all the masculinity gone besides in the movies? Big world, small café, I was reminded.

"If she only knew who I am," Leslie said, walking past, "how do you think she might have reacted?"

"You mean if she thought she knew who you are...or who she might *think* you are? It's not the same thing."

"She'd probably call the cops for protection."

I said, "We're just lucky it's her and not Clint Eastwood or Steve McQueen we ran into."

Other than outside the courthouse, I can't recall anyone recognizing Leslie in public when we were together. Neighbors at both Linda and Judy's knew her for who she actually was, the pretty young woman in the apartment next door, not the counterfeit image of an evil monster that vested interests were so single-minded to keep perpetrating.

The Fourth of July—Independence Day. How ironic. I've always thought of this day as an even more significant event in the history of

Canada than the United States. Because that's when the Loyalists, sensing what the American Empire might turn itself into, set out to inaugurate a better way to live on the continent. For one thing, Canadians have democratically managed to get by for hundreds of years without incarcerating millions of its own citizens. The annual average cost of keeping someone like Leslie in prison is equivalent to what out-of-state residents pay for the best state college tuition.

Leslie and I had been invited to spend the day at a barbecue picnic in Monrovia, complete with a local fireworks display put on that evening by friends and neighbors of David and Shannon Van Houten. It was late when the modest but earnest fireworks ended. Les and I decided to spend the night back in Monterey Park at Jane's instead of Judy's. Jane was spending the night at Georgie's, so we had the place all to ourselves. Our plan the next day was to stop by the condo again and pack up some more things for our upcoming move to the outskirts of Santa Barbara.

Leslie suggested we hurry to bed once we got there. We had other things planned for tomorrow, including test riding Ducatis and Moto Guzzis in Glendale. So we headed upstairs straight away. Somewhere nearby, someone was still setting off fireworks—now there was a thought. In the bathroom, I took a warm cloth to my body and daubed a gram or two of baby powder in my shorts and under my arms. I don't know why I turned on the taps to cover the sound of my gargling with mouthwash. Feeling a bit wild like a madman that hadn't been fed in a while, I tore off all but my sweat socks, did a back-layout on to the mattress and watched closely as Leslie undressed after drawing the blind.

I'd already turned out all of the lights. To me, it always seemed better that way—closer somehow. Leslie pulled her top up over her head, tossed it toward the wicker chair and missed. Then, she stepped out of her jeans and panties both at the same time. She bent over slightly, reaching behind to unfasten her bra. Then, as she slipped in between the sheets beside me, I heard the crackle and felt the spark of our bodies when we made contact.

"Have I told you yet just how much I've missed you all these months?" Leslie asked.

"Have you really? Care to prove it?"

Laughing, she said, "You always say that."

I reached with one hand cupping her breast and slid the other around behind her. We stepped up the tempo of kisses. Then, with her lips and mine pressed hard and open, Leslie rolled onto her back and wrapped herself all around me. I had an erection so hard a cat could

climb it. She let one hand go to put me in tight where she wanted. No tricks or devices, just lots of rhythmic, openhearted lust taking over.

I'd been in a few close scrapes before, but somehow we both came out of this round of falls with only a few heavy bumps and some pretty mean scratches—nothing more serious. It had all been for a good cause, as far as I was concerned. I felt Leslie shiver and heard her sigh.

"Thank you for all that," I whispered.

For that enduring event I remained achingly grateful. Leaning back to take a close look in her eyes, I felt, even then, like a drowning man released from the depths at the last possible moment as he filled up his lungs with fresh air for the very first time.

"You know I love you...my jealous heart," she said in a serious tone. Then with expressed amusement, she added, "You really turn me on, big boy."

That cracked me up to no end.

"That's a good laugh, Leslie...really," I said, as I rolled out of bed and stood to attention.

Still laughing out loud before she calmed down, Les said, "No, I mean it. Despite all of the head games and insecurity, we're a very stable scene...you and me. It does my heart good to know this can last a lifetime if we want it to. Right here, right now…what I'm feeling is hard to describe…"

At that moment, I confess, I felt completely bound to her—body and soul. Forever and always. My heart turned to feelings the greatest of all English poets alleged when he said, "How sweet is love itself possessed, when but love's shadows are so rich in joy."

Consciously, in that moment, I wanted those feelings to last a lifetime—raised as it was with the scent of shadows and sighs.

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AFTERMATH

Recorded in my dream diary on the 5th of July 1978: Took an airplane ride with another man and a woman, who were strangers. Somehow the man, the pilot, managed to control the plane like a magic carpet, banking through narrow corridors of pine trees and Second Empire stone buildings. Suddenly, the pilot jumped out of the plane and carried me with him. We parachuted safely to land. I wasn't the least bit startled or bothered. The woman I saw was left strapped in the plane alone, soaring straight up to the vanishing point, while the pilot and I watched from the ground. He had (cruelly, I thought) programmed the plane to roll and dive in ways that were nonetheless thrilling to watch. I shouted with excitement, not thinking about the fate of the woman inside any more.

The plane crash landed in an open field of pink and blue-green clover. The ground was covered with honeycomb. The woman had changed into somebody else. However, she emerged from the bent and smoldering aircraft unscathed. She didn't appear the least alarmed by the fire in the cockpit, and that surprised me. I caught a flash of light reflecting a man's image off of broken wreckage. When I turned around, the mean-spirited pilot had vanished. I woke up thinking how few dreams were as obvious as this one seemed to be. All but for the mysterious, vanishing shadow.

The sun was up when I opened my eyes. The skies were clear except

for some faint-lingering smog. Morning birds were making a racket. Nearby, I could hear the shower taps running. Once Leslie turned them off and stepped out, I heard her humming some old R&B song. It was already past eight. It only seemed right to take chances. What were the odds if I begged her on bended knees that she would consent to revisit the shower?

This was going to be Big Wednesday for me—and I'm not talking about surfing. Our original plan was to make a return visit to the motorcycle shop in Glendale first, so we could test-drive one or two Italian-bred racers with time enough, after that, to make a choice, settle a price and buy one. If all went according to plan, we'd spend the afternoon touring LA beaches and canyons in outfits of denim and leather.

"I can see you're excited," Leslie giggled. "Is it me or on account of something else?"

"*Nothin'* compares with you, my darling young one."

"Care to prove it," she said, I laughed.

"What again?"

Then I thought, why the hell not?

Leslie got dressed in a bright summer print dress. I told her if we brought the bike home later that day, she'd have to change into something sturdier. I zipped up the back of her dress in the meantime, wrapped both arms around her and besieged the bridge of her shoulders with kisses. Leslie said she'd make us tea and toast while I shaved. When I was done washing up and came out to the patio, she was casually smoking a cigarette and reading the paper. I rolled a joint and smoked it alone while she finished her tea. I could tell she had other things on her mind besides buying a motorcycle, but I stuck to my selfish ambitions.

Once we got to the shop and parked the MG, Leslie put her hand on my forearm and told me, "We don't need a lot of things, Peter. You know that. Do we really need this machine more than we need to save for something more lasting?"

"Whatever you say, partner. But, consider this...we will both need our own means of transportation. And motorbikes are cheaper to run. I thought you wanted to be independent?" I teased, and then I suddenly felt tense in the gut but shook it off quickly. "Besides, you don't want the burden of having to provide *all* my excitement, do you?"

"You bet," Leslie said.

I sensed my bluff might be working.

Pointing over her shoulder at the Ducatis lined up inside the showroom, I pleaded, “Come on, darlin’. Let’s straddle that beast and go for a skate on the highway. Now it’s your turn to trust me for a change,” I said. “Shall we go?”

They had only one Ducati Desmo Super Sport on the floor, but it was priced way out of our league. However, there were at least ten new and used Guzzis all spiffed up and polished. Three were brand-spanking new 850 Le Mans nearer our price range.

Leslie asked the salesman if she could use the telephone. Meanwhile, I climbed on a fire-engine red V2 Moto Guzzi. It was a tad exotic—with a five-speed shaft drive and some relatively new appliance they called “integral braking.” I couldn’t wait to turn her on and twist open the throttle.

“Get off the phone Leslie, will ya?” I said impatiently.

It was routine during deliberations, for Leslie to check in every couple of hours. She’d usually call either Max or Dante, her bondsman. Since she was still out of reach on the phone, I guessed she was talking to Max or her mother. The salesman kept smiling and helped me push the bike out to the curb where I could start her. I was just about to switch on the engine when, looking all ashen and pale, Leslie came walking towards us.

“We gotta go,” was all she needed to say.

I knew what this meant. The verdict was finally decided.

It meant one of three basic outcomes: win, lose or draw. Naturally, a manslaughter conviction would be great, and first-degree would be a disaster. But, at this point, another hung jury or even a second-degree murder conviction would represent a victory of sorts. Van de Kamp wouldn’t dare try her again for a fourth time! Would he? Could this be the moment for more justice than politics? A trend toward espoused rehabilitation more than practiced revenge? Or just more propaganda and hypocrisy—same as before—as if it never ends?

The jury informed the judge they had reached a unanimous decision. Now, the court was waiting on Leslie and Max to show up. Max was en route back from his ranch in Paso Robles, which is two hundred miles north of Los Angeles. Depending on traffic, it could still take him hours to get there. Leslie and I arrived at Max’s Security Pacific office before him. When he arrived, we walked the six blocks from the plaza to the hall of justice together. I kept quiet the whole way and let Leslie and Max talk. I would say they looked worried, but that only seemed normal. Nothing to panic about.

We made our way past the swarm of reporters beginning to buzz

around the building and corridor in front of Judge Ringer's superior court. Max ushered Les and me into a private conference room off to one side of the court. For almost an hour, or so it seemed to me, Les and I held hands while bailiffs set the stage next door with appropriate props. When the time came for Leslie to be led into the courtroom, I gave her one last kiss for good luck. Then, I walked back to a spot among the gallery of friends and reporters.

I was certain there were people I knew all around me, but Les was the only point on which I affixed any awareness. After all the preliminary rituals had been dispensed with, the jury foreman read out the verdict: "We the jury, in the above entitled action, find the defendant, Leslie Van Houten, guilty of murder. And we further find it to be murder in the first-degree."

Leslie flinched a split second and gripped the arms of her chair. There were some gasps in the courtroom. Someone somewhere was crying. There may even have been some shouting like you see in the movies. Seconds later, Leslie turned around quickly, then straight ahead once again—stoic as ever. During that glimpse, I thought I could see a startled look in her eyes. Her lips were parted and her cheeks were pale. My first response to something as abysmal as this was to feel nothing at all. Feeling? That would have to come later. First, I had to get over the shock.

After hearing the verdict, the judge announced he was revoking Leslie's bond. According to protocol, he remanded her into the custody of the sheriff until formal sentencing, which he immediately scheduled for July 21st. Sheriff's deputies led Leslie away and put her in handcuffs. The door closed. The courtroom emptied. I was the last person to leave, except for the bailiff who hurriedly led me out.

I passed goodfellas Stephen Kay and Dino Fulgoni in the corridor outside the courtroom. I heard Kay tell his colleague, "The battle is over. We won."

All I could muster was a pathetic taunt of no consequence. Admitting how easy it is to be brave from a distance, I said, "It's just a game to you Mr. Kay, isn't it?"

"Huh?" was his startled response.

On second thought, he stopped walking away, turned around and bravely restated his formula, "No," he said to me, "it's the law."

"You know what Edmund Burke said about laws, don't you? He said improper rulings are the worst sort of tyranny. Any comment?"

"Whatever," Stephen Kay shrugged.

Then, he and Dino Fulgoni continued congratulating each other. So much for the philosophical wisdom of modern conservatism.

District Attorney John Van de Kamp told the press he felt this verdict vindicated him for the decision to prosecute Leslie a third time on three counts of first-degree murder. One each for Leno and Rosemary LaBianca, plus an additional count of conspiracy to commit murder—which included the five victims at 10050 Cielo Drive. Even though that carnage was something Leslie didn't know about until after it happened, the DA needed the conspiracy charge to justify his claims about premeditation. Personally, I suspected the fix was in somewhere, but I couldn't begin to prove this, of course. Call it "intuition." That's what I do.

Prosecutors Stephen Kay and Dino Fulgoni upheld that Leslie's involvement in these terrible crimes was the result of malice aforethought on her part. Even though she didn't actually kill anyone herself, she was found guilty of aiding and abetting a crime where co-conspirators murdered their victims.

After the verdict was read, jury foreman John L. Crigler told the press that he and his fellow jurors "felt Ms. Van Houten had suffered some diminished capacity. But we just couldn't determine that it was diminished to the extent that was required to relieve her of responsibility for what she had done." I couldn't help wondering why no one bothered to ask Mr. Crigler for his understanding of the phrase "*beyond a reasonable doubt?"*

I spent the next days and weeks camped out at Jane Van Houten's house. David and Betsy were also there with me off and on much of the time. Linda Grippi stopped by the most. Max Keith was looking the worst for wear I would say. Thankfully, Judy Frutig was there to look after him. To me, the overall mood was one of shock, numb disbelief and a feeling of absolute emptiness. As always, the person who held it together best was Leslie's mom—with the likely exception of Leslie herself.

First thing in the morning the day after the verdict, Jane and I went to see Leslie at Sybil Brand. We wished we'd seen the last of that place already. This was the worst visit that I can remember. I acted a coward—pacing the visitors' room, glaring at Leslie—I wasn't the compassionate man I hoped I would be at this moment. When the time came to stand tall, I only got ugly. I was childish, frustrated, senseless, crazy and mad. Leslie was crying. I could hear devils inside my head chattering hidden behind every wall. At some point, right in front of

her mother, I said something terribly hurtful, stupid and small.

"You know, Leslie. Maybe if you hadn't had Max parade your dates as 'character witnesses' on the stand during the trial, you may not have turned off the jury."

I knew only too well how to stab at the heart and pierce her emotions. If words of comfort skillfully chosen were summoned for, I did far worse than miss the call to chivalry. Shame has mercifully scoured the surface of those recollections. All I know is that I was a miserable lout.

After drying her tears with a tissue, Leslie said, "You were teaching in Canada. It wasn't my idea, you know."

It was all I could do to keep from growling.

"Max is going to get Paul Fitzgerald, another lawyer, to help him with further motions from now on."

"Max looks exhausted," I said.

"We may still have some options. The first step will be to ask the judge for a delay in the sentencing."

"What reason will they give?"

"To reach a deal for being given the date of my expected release," Leslie said. "What? You don't think there's a chance? I know it still sounds like a long shot."

Before I could say what I'd thought about long shots, Jane tapped my shoulder to signal it was time to wrap up and move on. I told Leslie I'd be back the next day alone. Now I know why so many depressed people go shopping after a huge let down or some other heartbreak. It's shock. My fight, flight or freeze mechanism all kicked in together. There was no blood flow to my brain. All distractions are equal as distractions. I'd lost the girl, but there was always a mechanical bride somewhere on the horizon. No use just moping around. After all, I tried assuring myself—this was still California.

The Moto Guzzi Le Mans was now out of the question. But Leslie's MG still had to go on the block. It was burning a quart of oil with every fill up. So David Van Houten and I prowled around several car auctions that week, hoping to trade the B in for something better. With the help of a dealer named Paul, I swapped the MGB plus some cash for a mocha-brown Fiat 124 Spider—disc brakes on all fours. What she lacked in appearance and horsepower, she made up for in lightweight control. My kind of go-cart. If I'd gotten the bike as planned, this car would have been Leslie's. This was to be our new family car.

David was helping me wax the Fiat in the laneway in back of his mom's house. I was just starting to fasten my new blue and gold California license plates (#442-VGC) to the bumper, when I spotted Judy Frutig's 240-Z parked at the end of the alley. It looked to me like she had somebody with her, but I couldn't make out who it was.

"She here for you?" I asked David, loud enough so that Judy could hear me.

"No," Judy said, "It's you I wanted to talk to, Peter. If you don't mind?"

Davy pondered his cue, dried his hands off on his jeans and asked if anyone wanted a glass of iced tea. Then, he went through the garage and inside the house.

"I'm not sure you fully appreciate what a *private* person Jane is," Judy announced. "As a friend of the family, Glen asked me to remind you of this in case you missed it. We feel that it's time for you to please leave her alone. She's been through plenty and needs this time to herself. And given the change in circumstances with Leslie, there's no need for you to be here any longer."

"This is a message from who exactly, Judy? You or Glen?" I asked. "No matter really," I quickly reflected. "What you say about Jane is true enough. She's asked me to stay as long as I want or feel I need to. But who do *you* think you are telling me what I already know? In case I missed it. What gall!"

"It's not always about you, Peter. It's what's best for Jane and Leslie that we should be talking about. Don't you have somewhere else to go?"

Right about then, I wanted to start screaming, instantly dreaming of punching the lights out of her next twenty boyfriends.

"What's it to you where I'm going? And why are you and Glen always so concerned with my whereabouts?" I said, swelling with anger.

But Jude wasn't the least intimidated by me anymore.

"Let me finish." Judy held up her hand like a traffic cop. "I've spoken to Leslie. I know what you said about me...about Glen...and about our involvement. It's none of your business. None! None of what happens here should concern you."

"Now, you're telling me what my concerns are or should be? Talk about 'none of your business'."

I tossed my wrench on the ground.

"See? That's what I mean." Judy said.

Just then, David came back outside. I was sure he overheard the last part of what Judy was saying. She stiffened up. At this point, I

chose to ignore her.

Davy said, “Peter, someone named Martin just called. I told him you were busy. He left a number for you to call.”

I looked back at Judy and told her, “I’m sorry, Judy. This is all fascinating, but I’m afraid I have to take this.”

Only I didn’t. I simply went back to what I was doing before and ignored her. Screwing California plates on to the bumpers of my new car. Judy huffed, turned around and marched away down the alley unchallenged.

The next day I drove to Laguna Nigel to visit with Michael and Jane Malone. I needed a friend to talk to, preferably an older man who was wise about what to do when one’s lost the object of love. Sometimes it’s best not to try and talk at all, provided you do it with the right people. And I wanted them to see my new car. We left the Spider parked in the driveway and took their white Mercedes saloon-class sedan to Tijuana for lunch. After another quick stop on the Baja for something or other, we continued as far south as the Rosarito Beach Hotel—just like we’d planned once before as a foursome. Once a playground for those who could afford to get away during Prohibition, this place once boasted the largest barroom on the coast from San Francisco to Mazatlán. Inscribed over the entranceway were painted these words: *Poresta Puerta Pasan Las Majeres Mas Hermosas Del Mundo*, which Michael translated as *Through These Doors Have Passed the Most Beautiful Women of the World*. We talked about Leslie the whole way and back. Rosarito didn’t know all they were missing, but I did. And thinking about Leslie might be going through was really breaking my heart.

Back to LA a couple of days later, Martin Bijaux called again checking in. I can’t honestly say that I’d missed him. Sometimes, he rubbed me the wrong way. I’m sure he felt the same way about me, but we remained friends all the same. And he was a good companion to take on my next trip to Santa Barbara. First on the “to do” list was to cancel the interim rental Leslie and I had left for the apartment on Camino Del Sur. What I needed now was a dark cabin in a thorn brush somewhere to match my ragged disposition.

Looking for the student housing office on campus, we passed by Phelps Hall. I decided to stop in to see who was around. As luck would have it, we ran into Mark Phillips straight away. His office door was wide open and I said, “Dr. Phillips, I presume,” leaning my body inside without knocking.

“Peter Chiaramonte! Good to see you,” Mark said.

“It’s good to see you too, professor. Mark, I’d like to introduce my friend Martin.”

“Please come in. Come in and sit down. I must say I was sorry to hear the news about Leslie. Tell me, how is she holding up?”

I answered quickly, hoping we might change the subject. “We only stopped by for a moment. I’m still looking for somewhere to live. We were just looking for the housing office—”

Mark said, “There’s not much time left. Most places are already taken.” Then he sat up straight from his casual slump and added, “As a matter of fact, it just so happens my current housemate is moving to Germany next month. End of August. I’ve been looking for someone to take over his end of the house. I’ll be home in an hour if you’d care to see it? It’s a pretty big ranch house built on a cliff overlooking the ocean.” Listening to this, I giggled nervously, thinking he might be making the part about the ocean view up. Then I could see he was serious.

“The whole place is surrounded with shuttered windows and sliding glass doors,” he said smiling. “Plenty of wood beams holding the roof up.”

When I asked what the rent was, Mark suggested I see the place first to see if I’d like it. The lease he said was “negotiable.” I thought at first he was teasing, but felt compelled to check the place out for myself. Mark drew us a map when we asked for directions.

Martin and I left straight away. We drove south on Las Palmas Drive through one of the wealthiest suburbs in all of southern California, the incorporated exurbia of Santa Barbara known as Hope Ranch. Even in those days, there wasn’t a home priced below millions of dollars. We passed out of the eastern gates into the more bourgeois neighborhoods on either side of Cliff Drive and shared a joint with the top down. Mark’s house was just off of Yankee Farm Road near the cul-de-sac off Braemar Drive. The shelf of land on which it stood was hundreds of feet above Hendry’s Beach and had a clear view of the ocean—true enough.

I thought to myself, “Leslie should see this.”

In front of the house was a half-acre orchard of oranges and avocados. There was an overgrown vegetable garden beside the garage that needed attention. Facing north, you could see the mountains climbing up above Rattlesnake Canyon. Looking the other way around about an eighth of a mile from the shoreline, there appeared to be four or five surfers in wet suits. Only one was riding a wave while the others were paddling out or was floating in blue-green

swells and waiting their turn for the big one.

"What do you think?" I turned to Martin and asked, assuming he was in the same state of awe that I was.

"What do I think?" Martin repeated. "I think it's ironic. In some bloody strange way, you've stumbled into a Xanadu...you lucky sod."

"Do you think Leslie would like it?" I asked, ever hopeful.

Martin shrugged and said nothing.

Just then, Mark turned in the long narrow driveway. Before he had time to come to a complete stop and turn off the engine, I asked him, "When can I move in all of my stuff?"

* * *

On Friday, July 21st, Leslie appeared in court with her lawyers. Judge Ringer granted her lawyers' request for a three-week delay in the sentencing. That way, the defense would have time to prepare the new series of motions that Leslie had spoken about. The first motion would ask the judge to grant Leslie a new trial and/or grant a reduction in charges. To our way of thinking, this only seemed fair given the incessant levels of reasonable doubt. And if Judge Ringer were to agree to such a reduction, a further motion would ask that Leslie be granted immediate release on probation. That didn't just seem like wishful thinking, black magic either. It was fair to say we still believed in the possibility.

But then on Friday August 11th, nine years after the crime for which she originally stood convicted, Leslie Van Houten was sentenced to two life terms for the August 10th 1969 murder of Leno and Rosemary LaBianca. *Plus* an additional life term for conspiring to murder, including those killed at 10050 Cielo Drive the night before. No matter that Leslie had never been there or even heard of what happened until it was over, the law always seems a curious contraption to someone as naïve as I was.

Max tried to explain about the all-encompassing conspiracy charge to Betsy and David, but, I must say, it still didn't make any real sense to me. For one thing, this conspiracy charge allowed Stephen Kay to continue to show the most gruesome crime photographs, including those of a pregnant and horribly mutilated Sharon Tate Polanski, at any and all trials or parole hearings Leslie must endure from here to eternity. But Les wasn't there and didn't hear anything about it until after it happened.

During my next visit with Leslie, I could see that she remained hopeful in spite of the odds. There was still some talk in our camp that

the worst she might serve would be maybe a year or two—tops. We were sure she'd be at least given a firm date for her release in as little as six to nine months. Even *I* could wait that much longer.

"I can't seem to sleep much," Leslie said. "I'm too tired to read or write either. Please don't expect too many letters from me right away. I'm feeling pretty beat up. I'll write more when I'm feeling better. You know, Peter, it's important to me that you are free. You have a way of locking yourself up just like I am. I haven't the choices you have anymore. Please don't put on any more handcuffs."

"What are you saying?" I asked, feeling dazed and confused by that particular reference.

"I don't want you to ever *not* do something you wanted to do...not because of me or some thought of me getting in the way. If you want to do something, just do it. The only thing I ask is that you use your discretion on how much to tell me. Sometimes it's best to not share everything, and this would be one of those times. I don't believe that loving one another, even as friends, should mean ever putting on limits. I've had all of that I can take."

"I still don't see what you're getting at Les." Maybe I did. Still, I pretended.

"Now's not the time for any more head games. You know what I'm saying. I don't want you to wait for me any longer."

Every word she delivered felt like a body blow. Therefore, I tightened my gut.

She said, "I'm not saying I believe in open, free relationships. Because, if things were more regular, I wouldn't be saying these things. It's just super-important that you understand the way things are different now. Some things we wished for will never be. Okay? There's no use pretending. I want you to be free. It's important."

"Then who will you share your dreams with, if not with me?" I asked, ashamed of how pathetic that sounded.

"Who will I share my dreams with? I'll share them with me. I have to make a life for myself inside of prison...something you wouldn't know about. It's pretty far from the places you're going."

"We could still get there together, Leslie. That was the plan. If not for you, I wouldn't be going anywhere either."

"It wasn't the 'plan,' Peter. Not anymore. That was the *dream*. The plan would have come later. Now, we must make other plans."

I was crushed.

"I don't see how things are much different. We've been through this sort of thing before. What's changed?"

"Everything's changed. Things are different now. Can't you see?

It's important to me we don't create a prison environment between us. What we had, we had. Now, it's over. It was spontaneous,and I want us to hang on to the memories of that if we can. I'm tryin' to explain as best..."

"What's to explain? I said. It's seems clear to me."

Clearly it wasn't. Leslie repeated her stance.

"I'm not very good at this, but it's inevitable. So I want to do it now and get it over. I think by now it's obvious things *aren't* the same, nor will they ever be. You need to find somebody else."

I didn't want to hear anymore. So, in order to win a stay of execution, I decided to run and retreat.

"Whatever you say, Leslie," I said, standing up but continuing to talk on the headset. "If you want it this way, then that's the way it must be. I'll wait until things settle down before I bring it up again. You say when it's okay for me to come see you."

I was a zombie in shock—most obviously.

"Okay then," she said. "Most of all, I wish you happiness. Go well, my darling."

Leslie put down her headset, stood up, turned her back to me and was taken away to her cell.

What did I just hear her say? Was there some level of wisdom going on that I missed? "Now it's over." "You need to find somebody else." What the fuck? I couldn't believe it, nor face up to it.

Leslie was more of her own person at this point than I was. Self-reliant, true and tough to a fault. I got the feeling she was trying to help raise me to a higher level of first-person awareness in myself. She had a way of understanding herself that involved delving deeper than simply cataloguing the most effortlessly accessible pieces. I wanted and needed more of that transcendent power for myself, and maybe that's what attracted me to Leslie most of all in the first place. Leslie was never an object for me the way other people—especially women—could be or become. Even when we were apart, she always felt close—just like music. I could feel the pulse in my chest and my fingertips, and always felt a little dizzy.

The compelling attraction I felt for her the moment I saw her picture in the paper long ago didn't just occur in that instant. There was something familiar already present. And what I found most intriguing from the very beginning was the connection I made between her striving for transcendence through reflective experience and psychedelic explorations of my own. I thought we shared the same intellectual-affective curiosities as well as the same vulnerability to any number of nefarious miscreants who happened along at some

exact moment.

21

LA GRANDE ILLUSION

Three days later, Leslie was taken under armed guard back to the California Institution for Women at Frontera, which made it sound more like a college campus than what it really was. I spent that day at her mom's. It took less than an hour to pack the few boxes of books and things that I kept there, including my Smith Corona electric, best black and blue denims, good leather boots and a jacket. I took time to shop for comfort and buy enough new toys to distract me. That seemed to work before, so I tried it again. But, as Andy Higgins always reminded me when quoting self-taught philosopher, Eric Hoffer, you can never get enough of what you really don't need.

All the same, I bought myself a new pair of Munari hockey skates and six Sherwood R5 fiberglass sticks from the pro-shop inside the ice rink at Santa Monica. There was a rink just like it that Martin and I found in Santa Barbara called the Ice Patch. It was only a couple of miles from my new digs on Braemar Drive and ten to twelve minutes, by car, east of the University of California at Santa Barbara—less if you picked the right hour. When in doubt of your feelings, put on your skates.

There was more than one sense in which my situation appeared to get better in proportion to how Leslie's grew worse.

Less than a week later, on the 23rd of August, I sent Leslie a card with a long letter enclosed for her 29th birthday. It included a half-dozen stanzas from a new book of poems by Leonard Cohen. Despite our diverging tracks and new road conditions, Les and I were both prone to the same sorts of overcast mood on occasion. Les didn't write as often as I did, but we still talked on the phone every once in a while. She knew where I would be on my itinerary of "goodbye LA" stops and visits. So she was able to call on a scheduled rotation of

family and friends. Leonard Cohen seemed the perfect accompaniment for the transitions we each had to make. *Hey, that's no way to say 'goodbye.'*

On September 7th, I paid Mark Phillips my first month's rent. Then, we got busy and auctioned off some of the stuff left by the grad student from Bremen. I used some of the proceeds to buy paint for my bedroom, hallways and bathroom—mostly Mediterranean white with pastel blues and green trim. I lay awake on the couch the whole first night while the paint dried, listening to ocean waves crashing. The next morning, I felt far more at home than I might have imagined so soon—especially when the first mail addressed to my new address arrived in the mailbox. The letter was from Leslie Van Houten, CIW 13378, 16756 Chino-Corona Road, Psychiatric Treatment Unit 67, Frontera.

My dearest Peter~

It's very late at night. I can't seem to sleep. My legs have recovered a bit from a week of throwing pots around—lifting heavy pans of excess food and running clean dishes to their proper locations. It's a job that eats up a large part of the day. Not what you would call intellectually stimulating.

It was good to talk to you and even better to hear you're as anxious as I am to get started with school. I know it will make you feel better once you find peace and order in your life again. You couldn't be living in a more beautiful place or going to a better university. It's really fine there. I wish I could be there to join you.

I'm holding up OK. Thanks. It's hard. But slowly I'm creating a mellow scene for myself. I'm spending a lot of my time alone. I would rather be alone than get into the jail talk—all the games—and so on and so forth. Old faces I can't relate to. It's rough writing because I must probe my own thoughts, rather than just entertain them. You know what I'm talking about. It's no journey's end and I mean it.

I'm anxious to start receiving the information from Antioch College. I think I'll start with English literature. Then move into film studies from there. What do you think? We can discuss it when you visit. It shouldn't be much longer before your forms are approved. Please give my hello's to your friends and all the wild horses tied to the fences…

Love~
Leslie

When she called the next weekend, Leslie said, "Your visitor's application report came in and it's on the superintendent's desk. I'll call you when I hear their determination, which should be sometime later this week. I sure hope so.

"I have no one to talk to," she often said. "Sometimes I miss a good conversation more than I miss eating good food."

Other times when she called, we talked about the work I was doing to prepare for classes—well, that's mostly what I talked about. I told her all about my exciting travels. It was mostly all about *me*. Leslie was patient at first, putting up with my boasting. I don't know why I was telling her about the briefings I got on the dynamics of seduction in the legends surrounding our program. Maybe that's what you get

from staging Gestalt encounter groups in Esalen-style hot tubs. Mark Phillips had several sagas of *femme fatales* and dark knights to tell me about. I shared this gossip in letters to Leslie. I might have done better to keep such things to myself. I want to go back if I could and take several steps over. Don't you wish life was like that? But the only way forward is straight up the road. The way ahead seems lighter the clearer you can see back to the fork in the road that led you to this vantage point.

The annual confluent education retreat was held that fall in a venue at the University of California facility out by the edge of the Devereux Lagoon known as Cliff House. This small conference center was built on a fine point of land that overlooked the spectacular view of the Channel Islands. Inside, there was a wood fireplace made of fieldstone at one end of the hall, and the kitchen was all laid out for the potluck at the opposite end. I brought two bottles of wine, two loaves of fresh bread and four jars of white sturgeon caviar. I'd picked up the wine and caviar that same afternoon from my new neighbor's Portuguese cook.

I was the last to arrive—a few minutes late and probably stoned when I got there. (That's why I kept a bottle of Scope in the glove box.) George and Stew were just coming to the end of their introductory remarks when I was putting the wine in the freezer. I could hear individual members of the new cohort introducing him or herself. I was last to say who I was, where I was from and what led me to Santa Barbara. I didn't exactly make up the last part, only I left out any reference to Leslie. My professors were the only ones in Santa Barbara who knew my reason.

Later on in the evening, I found myself working in either one-on-one or slightly larger ensembles of colleagues, mostly from Europe. (Only half the class that year was from the United States.) I was especially drawn to working with a trio of fast friends I met that were from Norway—Otto, Annamarit and a beautiful woman named Audhild Brændsrød. She was, in fact, the challenge Mark Phillips had warned me about coming into the program. Turned out that he had his own agenda on that front, and I was the last one in that "triad" to know what my roommates were up to. Thus began the next endless chapter of my romantic life, such as it was. But that's a whole other story.

Suffice it to say that before I met Leslie I hadn't taken too many girls seriously in terms of long-lasting romances. It sounds trite to say easy come, easy go, but that's because the cliché is an archetype. Still,

that doesn't do justice to the way I felt about Leslie. One way I thought to get over one girl was by way of another. You can never get enough of what you really don't need to make you happy.

Audhild was blonde and about the same height as Leslie—maybe a bit shorter—with a very different allure. Whereas Leslie rarely, if ever, wore lipstick or makeup, Audhild sure knew how to light up a dark room like a lantern. She had an arctic sparkle in those cool, pale cobalt-blue eyes of hers. And, that night, she had on a light shade of fox-blue eye shadow and soft-pink lipstick that I soon discovered tasted like peaches. Les always reminded me of former fashion model and *Vogue* editor, Carine Rotfeld, for some reason. To me, Audhild was more like Swedish actress Bibi Andersson. And that's not just me being superficial either. Mike Malone said he thought so too, when I took Audhild to meet the Malones the very next weekend. I don't know what I was trying to prove by taking her with me to Laguna Nigel and Rosarito. But that's what began to happen on a regular basis. Things naturally emerge and evolve, don't they? And so must our tolerance for imperfection—in ourselves as well as in others. See? I may have learned something in school after all.

My first semester in graduate school involved basic training in Gestalt therapy, psychosynthesis, bodymind conditioning and dreamwork. It was kind of a cult, come to think of it. I also read antecedent philosophy and existential psychology on my own. My professors were all into F.S. Perls quite a lot, and my new housemate, Mark, counseled me in that subject as well. We studied his "hot seat" transcripts and discussed Gestalt theory in classes with George Isaac Brown. I also read all I could comprehend of Gregory Bateson, then a regent of the University of California. Bateson was living and teaching at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur. That's where confluent education got its start. That's also where Otto Fuglestad and I often took off for the weekend.

During the aftermath of what had happened with Leslie, Stewart Shapiro got involved with my personal affairs. He and I had a meeting with George and Mark, after which George recommended—and Stew insisted—that I undergo special counseling with a Jungian psychiatrist, Samuel Correnti. Dr. C. was a colleague of theirs who worked in private practice. Since Stew wanted to make this a condition of my being admitted into doctoral studies, I agreed to see Correnti twice a week for an hour.

When I asked Les over the phone how her own psyche work was going, she said, "It's been kinda rough in here lately. Today was a real

bummer. We had our weekly group. All that means is that everyone sits in a room and complains. It's stifling. Everyone takes advantage of the fact that if anyone leaves before it's over they get a write-up. So childish. So boring. Nothing positive. Only gutter talk."

"I wouldn't know what to do with my frustration if I were you, Leslie. I really don't know how you hold it together."

It was clear to me then just how much braver she was than I was or, frankly, how much stronger she was than any of those I'd seen in the hallowed halls of justice that condemned her to prison.

"I told you I'm seeing the Malones when they visit. It helps to have friends on the outside," she said.

"Isn't there anyone inside you can count on for friendship?" I asked her.

"Only some. I need to protect myself from all the ugliness inside of this place, that's for sure. It beats down on your soul. See...in here, even the *word* 'positive' is something you never hear used. I need to protect myself from that sort of thing. I need to have my walls up to maintain my own sense of who I am as a person. I'm sorry I haven't responded much to your letters. I feel there's a lot I want to say, but it's hard to write about nothing but sadness. It will be better when you visit. Then, we can talk and at least search into each other's eyes.

"Of course, I wonder when this nightmare will end. My job keeps me busy throughout the day. But, in the evenings, I hide in my room and only peek out every once in a while. This is rough, Peter...the roughest yet. You can't imagine. This evening, I turned on the radio to listen to whatever was on. It was 'Here Comes the Sun'...I certainly hope so."

There were a few moments silence, during which I suspect we were both replaying The Beatles tune in our heads.

Leslie said, "I know you must be wondering where the visiting forms are. Well, they are stuck at the bureau of identification. I think it's taken longer than we expected on account of your being Canadian. By the end of the week, I'll follow up to see what the hang up is. It's a drag, I know."

"Well, that's the first time I've ever felt sorry for being Canadian," I confessed.

"Looks like time's up. Please take good care of yourself and write when you can...even if I don't write you back right away. Let that be okay. Okay? (*Kisses*) I hope that you understand."

Several weeks passed without further word from Leslie. I thought she

had promised to call me on November 27th, but, for some reason, that call never happened. Although, that same afternoon I received the following letter from Kathleen M. Anderson, the superintendent at CIW in Frontera.

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTION FOR WOMEN
16756 CHINO-CORONA ROAD
FRONTERA, CALIFORNIA 91720

November 24, 1978

Peter Chiaramonte
3070 Braemar Drive
Santa Barbara, California 93109

Dear Mr. Chiaramonte:

Thank you for your interest and letter of inquiry, dated 11-18-78, in which you ask about your visiting privileges status regarding Leslie Van Houten, housed in PTU (W13378).

I approved this request on 11-6-78. The Psychiatric Treatment Unit Program Administrator, Mr. Nelson informs me that Leslie intended to advise you of this approval before now.

Sincerely yours,

Kathleen M. Anderson,
Superintendent

When Leslie called a few days after that, I asked her to please explain the meaning of Anderson's letter.

I asked her, "Why the delay in my finding this out? I thought this was what we...both of us...really wanted?"

Then, it hit me. I felt the impact before she even let go all the words.

"It's hard to say this to you, Peter, but I've made the decision... so here goes. I think it would be too hard for me to see you right now. That's all. I hope you can accept this without going into any full-blown explanations."

Once I had time to think things over, I could see there was no choice but to respect her decision. In a way, I felt that Leslie was letting me off for bad behavior or for my own good as much as her own. If I were ever to stand a chance of remaining close, I'd have to prove to her and myself that I really wanted to accept her new terms. Though I tried not to dwell on being too broken up over the way

things fell apart, I had a good psychonaut to help me work through some of the blind spots. It was sure to take me a while to let go of last longings for Leslie.

The next morning, I had my first appointment with Dr. Samuel Correnti at his office on State Street near Mission. Dr. C. was a dark-haired, good-looking man I guessed to be in his forties. The first time we met, he wore a brown and black wool and suede sweater. I remember admiring the way he presented himself, and I noted how bright and bristling he was with self-confidence.

We talked very little about the whole business with Leslie at first, even though that was what I was mostly thinking about. Instead, we spent most of the first week's sessions discussing my family upbringing and where I grew up. Just before leaving, he asked me to please come prepared the next time with a written account of my dreams. He wasn't precise about how much time, discipline and trust would be required for my ongoing treatment. For what exactly? He couldn't say. Something about how a weak ego cannot, by will and faith alone, surmount the profoundest yearning nor end the deepest sorrows. That's all I wrote in my journal.

At our next meeting later that week, we talked some more about my family history. Still in the midst of his preliminary analysis, Dr. C. asked me, "What is the earliest childhood memory that you can recall?"

It took me a long time to appreciate just how much each of our lives can be determined by so few early childhood experiences. Whatever the source of my conflicts, my inability to cope at the time may have cost me the love of my life. Then again, my time together with Leslie was so fated and brief that it may have been lost to begin with.

Living in Santa Barbara soon brought about other interests for me to pursue. There were plenty of intellectual challenges, romantic chances and other distractions to deal with. Besides schoolwork, teaching, training and soaking in hot tubs—not to mention the hours I spent on the couch in Correnti's office—I met a group of some very good hockey players at the Ice Patch that winter. That's where I was first introduced to Monte Schulz, son of "Peanuts" cartoonist Charles M. Schulz, the only player in town I thought might be better than I was. Monte and I quickly became friends, both on and off the ice. His understated, yet innate athletic spirit, reminded me of the late and very great Buck Buchanan.

During that first season playing in California, Monte and I put together a decent "all-star" team I liked to call "The Santa Barbarians." We boasted veterans like Don Swann (another ex-pat from Toronto who worked at Delco), a few former Junior A players from Flin Flon, Manitoba, and "Boston" Dave Barlow. When Monte and I played away on the road, the guys in the vans would carry our sticks and equipment—on account of the fact we couldn't fit our bags into Monte's 308 GT4 Ferrari. Life was tough, and I don't mean that as sarcasm either. It was during this time of rising dissimilarity that Leslie and I steadily lost touch with each other. I hope that you understand and might explain it to me someday.

* * *

On February 1st, 1979, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Leslie Van Houten would have to wait another year before the community release board would reconsider her request for parole.

Board chairperson, Ruth Rushen, was quoted as saying to Leslie, "We feel we must observe you longer before we can project your parole date."

Despite excellent reports from prison psychologists and prison staff, the board's justification for denying her petition was that "Society has no defense…in this type of crime, except to isolate the offender."

Another issue Leslie's parole board raised as an objection had to do with the types of men she's been attracted to in the past.

In response to that, Leslie was quoted as saying, "In thinking back, I almost think I had too much going for me. I started dating guys that weren't equal to me...guys who were into their cars and not their books."

Upon hearing the panel's decision, Stephen Kay remarked out of glee, "Miss Van Houten appeared visibly shaken." And when asked about his personal feelings toward the board's ruling, he added, "This is beyond my wildest dreams. I'm ecstatic! If she gets out by the turn of the century, she'll be lucky."

Even while conceding that Leslie has been a model prisoner, during her entire incarceration, he insisted, "Society is happy she's doing well in prison. That's a good place for her to stay."

What a clear-cut incredible creep.

When Leslie called on the phone a few weeks later, I asked her how

she felt about the parole board's decision.

"Naturally, I'm disappointed," she said, "But I feel good about the overall tone of the hearing."

Then, she asked, "Did I tell you that I'll be moving soon? When I do, perhaps you'd like to come visit? The hours are better over in the other visiting room. Let me know, and I'll tell you the hours when I move."

I changed the subject. "And how are your college courses coming along? What are you taking?"

I didn't want to discuss any more about visiting her. I doubted either one of us wanted to open old wounds, however rationally or irrationally we associated these with one another. Parts of me hoped and feared that Leslie might need and want me as much as I needed and wanted her. Other parts were afraid that neither of us could ever feel the same way any longer. Somehow, I doubted Leslie held the same conflict.

"I'm doing okay, I suppose. School was delayed on account of the moving. One cool thing is that I'm taking a philosophy course *and* a psychology course both at the same time. I keep trying to put them together. That's natural, right? I've also started a writing course through correspondence with Antioch College. I'm really excited about that one. It's going to be great.

"In the philosophy class, I'm doing a presentation on behaviorism. Can you point me in the right direction? You know, give me the names of authors and references I can look up."

"Sure," I said. "But aside from that..."

"I know what you're going to say. If you want to know the truth...once in a while, I do get terribly lonely. It's great to see Mama, of course. She always has something nice to say or to ask about you. She really enjoys seeing you when you stay overnight in LA. I was happy to hear that you got that part-time job on the UCLA campus that you wanted."

I said, "I don't get the chance to see your mom as often as I'd like when I'm there. How about you, Leslie? What else is news?"

"I have to be honest. At times, my spirit sinks very low. I know this sounds stupid and sucky, but, in my lowest moments, I wish I *wasn't* so tough and determined. It only adds weight."

I lied and said, "I know what you mean."

"Did I tell you I work in the hospital clinic now?" Leslie continued. "It's a new experience for me. It's nothing too heavy. I doubt I'd ever work for a hospital on the streets...I mean, when I get home. I don't like using the phrase 'on the streets,' and I'm trying to break myself of

the habit."

"What's it like being back with the main population?" I wondered aloud.

"Pretty awful. The people on this side of the compound are not nearly as kind and flowery as those in the psych unit. Here, they feed off each other like vultures. Pretty 'tough cookies'...as they say. Speaking of which...it's getting crazy right here in the hallway. I've got to go deal with this now. I'm having a rough time putting my attention to this. Sorry. I really enjoyed reading your letter. Write again when it suits you. And let me know when you feel that you'd like to visit."

* * *

Throughout the rest of the year, the frequency of phone calls and exchange of letters fell off between us. In August 1979, just before her thirtieth birthday, Leslie sent me a brief update on the courses she was taking with Antioch College. There was no real mention of anything personal. We were back to where we started—as pen pals with fading returns. I thought I still wanted more than she was willing to give, or maybe I didn't. No, I did. I most certainly did. (Listen to me. I was beginning to sound just like one of those terrible, senseless songs by Charlie Manson.)

Although I continued to write one or two times after that, the last time we actually spoke was on January 17th, 1980. That was the same day Leslie had her hearing with the state board of prison terms. They again denied her release. It was also my twenty-ninth birthday.

After an afternoon game at the Ice Patch, friends and teammates threw me a surprise party. Even Tricia Woodbridge and Martin Bijaux drove up from LA together with Martin's girlfriend. They were to spend a few nights as my houseguests. There was this big barbeque with over thirty people—plus a memorable six-aside ball hockey game on my driveway. My side was losing 17-15 when we ran out of daylight. But it was great to see my hockey buddies having such a good time rapping with friends from UCSB and the confluent program —another two solitudes destined to meet.

The old boys from Flin Flon got a huge bonfire blazing out in the fire pit we built near the Coulter pines and white fir trees that lined our neighbor's fence. My friends from Amsterdam, Fried and Yvonne, led the gang 'round the inferno in a medley of songs by The Beatles and The Mamas and The Papas. Others were dancing and casting their shadows onto the stones, bushes, tree trunks and branches. Inside, a dozen people were drinking cheap wine and talking. Tricia and I

wandered off outside together to make out by some rocks near a picnic bench on the cliff's edge. The planets above were all whirling in orbit, and I felt the starlit seas curling and churning below. To me, the ocean looked like a sea of molten iron and lava. Yes, I was high as a kite.

"You know, Peter," Tricia said, "this whole time I've been meaning to ask you if you're still in touch with Leslie Van Houten?"

"Not much anymore," I said, looking out toward the southeast horizon. "Out of sight and out of my mind. I guess that makes me a 'blind idiot.' Sometimes, I think I've forgotten about her completely. Then, all of a sudden, there she is in my thoughts and dreams."

"What does that tell you?"

"Maybe something about how irresistible love can become absolutely impossible at times...but no less irrepressible. Confirmation that nothing ever works out, lawyers are mostly awful, unlawful cutthroats and thieves, and nobody gets me but me. How does that sound for being hard-done-by?" I asked, fumbling for comfort.

I didn't dare mention the guilt I felt for having treated the one I loved so badly.

She said, "It sounds very sad, though nonetheless real and imaginative."

I kissed her passionately for that, out of instinct.

It wasn't that late yet. I'd already had one or two cups of the magic mushroom tea that Annamarit and Dulcie had brewed with honey and almonds. Everyone, including Trish and myself, was really starting to get off. You could tell. The whole building was as charged as can be. I saw Tricia's hair turn to fire and her skin felt like electric-orange silken fabric. Her entire body was aglow, burning a hole in the room like the living room fireplace. I closed my eyes and the fires continued. I asked Trish to please play David Bowie's song "Heroes" a second time. Then, when it was over, someone switched the tape to a song Neil Diamond wrote for the Monkees. That changed the pace of things—let me tell you. Tricia and everyone else in the room got up to twist and shout along with the Wrecking Crew. I just sat there and admired the panorama of fire, flesh and debris passing in view.

The next thing I recall was Mark calling my name from the kitchen. There was a "collect call from Leslie."

"Sounds like a pretty nice party," she said, over the music and noise in the background.

"Yes. And it would be nicer still if you could be here in person."

There was a quiet break and then the crackle of static. A bad connection?

“It’s been a long time, Leslie. How are you?”

“I wanted to wish you a very ‘Happy Birthday.’ I’m glad I got through. It’s good to hear your voice. Though maybe I should let you go and have a good time if you’re busy...”

“No, wait…I’ll ask them to turn down the music,” I started to say, pausing to find my way through all the ether.

Seconds later, our connection was lost completely. Dead silence at her end. This wasn’t the first time something like this had happened. No reason to panic. I don’t know how long I went on waiting for her to call back, but she never did. Not then or ever again.

After hanging the receiver back on its cradle, I stepped outside to have another look ’round at the bonfire, just to make sure we weren’t burning the place down to ruins. It seemed to me as if I were staring the wrong way through a pair of trippy binoculars. I wandered all over the cliff side. Just then, I caught a flash of firelight reflecting off some shimmering object that lay beside the rocks on the ground. It was my silver chain and medallion that Leslie had given me. I didn’t even realize it had come undone or that I had lost it. When I picked it up, I saw that the top face of the coin had sheared off from its base. And, although I searched for it all through the night and again when the sun was up, I never found it. Not then or ever again.

EPILOGUE

At Leslie's parole hearing in 1980, Stephen Kay had told the board, "I'd feel better releasing a middle-aged, forty-year-old Leslie Van Houten than a thirty-year old Leslie Van Houten." Kay also admitted, "I've always said Leslie was the smartest and maybe the most normal of them all." He told the *Los Angeles Times* in 1980 that he didn't think Leslie should be locked up forever, but added it was "too soon to release her now." But later, frightened by the prospect of growing support for her release, Mr. Kay enlisted the family of the victims, led primarily by the family of Sharon Tate, to petition for keeping Leslie imprisoned indefinitely. Although Mr. Kay was once quoted as saying that, "She's the only one I could ever see getting parole," in 2002 he testified that parole for Leslie Van Houten at *any time* would be an error in judgment.

Vincent Bugliosi originally predicted that being "the least committed to Manson," Leslie would serve fifteen to twenty years. He admitted to Larry King, "I was impressed by her…She seems to be a model prisoner and everyone seems to say she is very remorseful for the murders." He later told *The National Enquirer,* "I want Leslie Van Houten to remain in prison for the rest of her life."

The parole boards continue to insist, regardless of the law they espouse to protect and obey, that the reason they can't give her a firm date for release is because of "the enormity of the crime."

As Leslie's good friend, filmmaker and writer John Waters has said, "It's the only thing she can never change."

No matter how much progress she's made or how good the psychiatric and conduct reports are, there's nothing she can do to change things.

In 1982, I received a letter from Martin Bijaux telling me that Leslie had fallen in love with a convict named Bill Syvin, who had begun corresponding with her while he was in jail. (Martin always was the bearer of such good tidings, wasn't he?) Evidently, Mr. Syvin was serving time on a grand theft auto rap and drug-related charges when he started writing letters to Leslie. Once released from prison, Syvin arranged to visit her in CIW at Frontera. The couple was married in a private ceremony at the prison and granted conjugal visits, of course. Leslie once described the arrangements to me as "like in a trailer park."

Syvin was later arrested and charged for possession of a stolen Chevy Corvette. A search of his residence also uncovered sets of stolen California Department of Corrections women's uniforms—like those worn by the female guards at Frontera. When Leslie found out about Syvin's wild scheme to arrange her escape, she immediately filed for divorce and never heard from him again.

On June 4th, 2002, Superior Court Judge Bob Krug issued an order requiring the parole board to provide evidence that shows why Leslie Van Houten should not be paroled. Judge Krug directed the board to explain what she must do to secure her release. The judge stated that a sentence of life without parole was unauthorized by law.

"I cannot find any indication where Ms. Van Houten has done anything wrong in prison. They can't keep using the crime forever and ever. That turns her sentence into life without parole."

Therefore, he ordered that, according to the California penal code, the parole board had a *legal obligation* to sanction her parole unless a case could be made that public safety remained in jeopardy.

Subsequently, the Fourth District Court of Appeal reversed Krug's decision in 2004 and ruled that he applied the wrong standard. Krug had claimed the parole board denied Leslie freedom based solely on the nature of the crimes themselves, without weighing Leslie's exemplary record of rehabilitation in prison. But, then, Governor Gray Davis further announced he would not sign the release papers into law, regardless of whether the parole board (under pressure from the court) so ordered or not.

In 2005, I was sorry to hear from Martin Bijaux that's Leslie's mother, Jane, had died in her sleep. Les's former attorney, Maxwell S.

Keith, died in 2012, the same year as Leslie's father, Paul. Co-conspirator Susan Atkins died in prison in 2009 from brain cancer. And, to date, all the others convicted in the Tate and LaBianca murders—Leslie, Charles Manson, Tex Watson and Patricia Krenwinkel—continue to serve life sentences in California state prisons.

Patrick Sequira, the assistant district attorney who took over lobbying against Leslie's parole after Stephen Kay's retirement, has argued there's something suspicious about Leslie going back to college behind bars to get her master's degree in philosophy. In front of the parole board, he inveighed against the classes Leslie was taking: "Democracy in Education," "Origins of Intelligence in Children" and "The Theory of Justice."

"Clearly," Mr. Sequira protested, "the inmate has a fascination with philosophy just as she had a fascination with the concepts that the Manson Family embraced. If there was true educational intent in changing oneself, you'd think it would be beyond studying philosophy."

How she could stand all that crap from people at the shallow end of the social gene pool, amazed me.

On June 6th, 2013, the day after Leslie Van Houten's twentieth parole hearing, I was having brunch near the University of Toronto with Coach Andy Higgins. We met at the Mercurio L'espresso Bar on Bloor Street West near the corner of St. George, less than a hundred meters from the new U of T track at Varsity Stadium. I'd been across the street all morning doing library research at OISE. That's where I was when I heard that Leslie's parole had been denied for the twentieth time. She is, after all, the youngest woman in the history of California to have been sentenced to the gas chamber, at age twenty-one. She has served longer in prison than any Nazi war criminal not sentenced to death at the Nuremberg Tribunals—which ended in 1949, the year that Leslie was born.

Andy asked if I was still writing a memoir about Leslie and the time we spent together. I said that indeed I had kept daily diaries and all of her letters. I did, after all—and largely thanks to Leslie—get my Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of California. I've been a full-time professor and subsequently kicked in and out of some of what are arguably the best—and worst—universities coast-to-coast in Canada, the United States, Europe and as far east as Bangkok, Thailand. And yes, I remain proud to say that I'm a socialization that

never took. I never put my roots down anywhere, not even home—wherever that is.

One of the things that Andy and I discussed that day was Leslie's prospects for ever being free again. I couldn't answer. I told him what I'd read by Associated Press reporter Linda Deutsch, quoting Leslie the day before as saying, "I know I did something that is unforgiveable, but I can create a world where I make amends. I'm trying to be someone who lives a life for healing rather than destruction."

After years of psychiatric treatment and intense self-examination, Leslie said she realizes that what she did was "like a pebble falling in a pond which affected so many people."

It's like Nietzsche's moral philosophy of the eternal return: I lived those moments with Leslie exactly as I would live them again and again for all time. Whatever regrets I may have about my jealous eruptions and other mistakes that I made, none of that would have mattered if we'd had the chance *then* to go on. Her going back to prison was beyond our control. But, for the longest time, I was convinced—given the strength of our bond and commitment to one another—we could have worked it out. I kept up the fantasy that we would have gone on to resolve these wrangles and grown sounder together, but that was all just wishful thinking on my part.

Leslie's next parole hearing is scheduled for the summer of 2018. She will be about to turn sixty-nine years old by then—and she will already have served all but six months in jail since she was a quite beautiful twenty year old. She was, in fact, the most credulous, adoring woman I have ever known, and I will always miss her.